

Research Assessment Exercise 2020
Impact Case Study

University: The Hong Kong Polytechnic University

Unit of Assessment (UoA): 28 Social Work and Social Policy

Title of case study: Development, Implementation, and Evaluation of a Positive Youth Development Program: The P.A.T.H.S. Project

(1) Summary of the impact

In response to the increase in problems affecting adolescents (such as anxiety, depression, and substance abuse) and the unhealthy lifestyles of junior high-school students, the P.A.T.H.S. project was created, tested, and implemented from 2005 to 2012. It was an innovative, empirically research-based positive youth development model, which initially targeted over 210,000 high-school students in Hong Kong. The success of the project led to the development of a school-based intervention model that was adopted by 237 schools and has benefitted more than 73,000 adolescents in Hong Kong between 2013 and 2019. As demonstrated by evaluation studies, official publications, and statements of top-ranking government officials, the program promotes youth development and reduces youth at-risk behavior. The model has been adopted in Macau, Mainland China, and Sri Lanka, and has been recognized by international communities (including the World Health Organization, Save the Children Sweden, and Youth Power Learning) for its innovative, evidence-based program.

(2) Underpinning research

Based on a 2004 survey of the literature, which showed that evidence-based multi-year positive youth development programs did not exist in China, the Hong Kong Jockey Club Charities Trust initiated the Project P.A.T.H.S. in 2005. Colleagues from five universities in Hong Kong were invited to form a research team, with The Hong Kong Polytechnic University (PolyU) as the lead institution and Prof. Daniel Shek as the Principal Investigator. The project included curriculum development, training, implementation, and evaluation. The guiding framework of the curriculum was the positive youth development (PYD) approach, which emphasizes the potential and abilities of adolescents. After consulting scientific studies and taking into account Chinese cultural considerations, we developed pioneering Chinese and English curriculum materials for junior high-school students. A number of publications, a training website, and a resource package were generated. Training was provided for 7,356 teachers and allied professionals, and evaluations of the training were conducted [R1, R2]. In the initial (2005–2012) and extension (2009–2016) phases, more than 320 schools and 284,400 students participated in the project. The research grant for the project was HK\$750 million.

To determine the efficacy of the program, evidence from several sources was collected. First, longitudinal findings based on a five-year randomized group trial with eight waves of data showed robust program effects, with students in the experimental schools showing better outcomes than the control students [R3, R4]. Second, subjective outcome evaluations showed that a range of stakeholders had positive perceptions of the program. Third, high program adherence was demonstrated by process evaluation. Fourth, various types of qualitative evaluations showed that the stakeholders saw a positive impact of the program on student development (for example, students in the program demonstrated a higher level of self-confidence). Evaluation findings from diverse sources clearly showed that P.A.T.H.S. was effective in areas such as the promotion of resilience and emotional management (as measured by the Chinese Positive Youth Development Scale). In a review of youth risk prevention and PYD programs in a global context, P.A.T.H.S. was identified as the only effective program in Chinese communities [R5]. This program was also held to be an effective intervention model in preventing drug abuse in young people [R6]. The program has been adapted in other locations, including Macau and Mainland China. From 2007 to 2010, a school in Shanghai that

had adopted the program showed very positive results. From 2011 to 2014, the program was piloted in four Tin Ka Ping schools in Shanghai, Suzhou, Changzhou, and Yangzhou. Systematic evaluations show that the program promotes the life skills and well-being of students (N=1,050) and the competence of teachers.

The commitment of the PolyU team led by Prof. Daniel Shek and the evaluation research in the initial phase of the project have led to the second (2009-2016) and third (2015-2019) phases of the Project P.A.T.H.S. in Hong Kong, and to the creation of programs outside Hong Kong, including Tin Ka Ping Project in Mainland China and the P.A.T.H.S. project in Sri Lanka. Key researchers in the project team included Prof. Daniel Shek (Chair Professor and Principal Investigator), Dr. Cecilia Ma (Assistant Professor), Dr. Janet Leung (Associate Professor), Dr. Moon Law (Teaching Fellow), and Dr. Andrew Siu (Associate Professor). All of them joined PolyU before 2013.

(3) References to the research

[R1] Shek, D.T.L., & Sun, R.C.F. (Eds.). (2013). Development and evaluation of positive adolescent training through holistic social programs (P.A.T.H.S.). Heidelberg: Springer.

[R2] Shek, D. T. L., & Sun, R. C. F. (2013). The Project P.A.T.H.S. in Hong Kong: Development, training, implementation, and evaluation. *Journal of Pediatric and Adolescent Gynecology*, 26(3S), S2–S9.

[R3] Shek, D. T. L., & Ma, C. M. S. (2012). Impact of the Project P.A.T.H.S. in the junior secondary school years: Objective outcome evaluation based on eight waves of longitudinal data. *TheScientificWorldJOURNAL*, Vol. 2012, Article ID 170345, 12 pages. DOI: 10.1100/2012/170345.

[R4] Shek, D. T. L., & Yu, L. (2012). Longitudinal impact of the Project P.A.T.H.S. on adolescent risk behavior: What happened after five years. *TheScientificWorldJOURNAL*, Vol. 2012, Article ID 316029, 13 pages. DOI: 10.1100/2012/316029.

[R5] Catalano, R.F., Fagan, A.A., Gavin, L.E., Greenberg, M.T., Irwin Jr, C.E., Ross, D.A., & Shek, D.T.L. (2012). Worldwide application of prevention science in adolescent health. *Lancet*, April, 32–43.

[R6] Shek, D.T.L. (2017). Prevention of drug abuse in Chinese adolescents in Hong Kong. In Israelashvili, D. and Romano, J. L. (Eds.), *The Cambridge Handbook of International Prevention Science* (pp. 635–657). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

(4) Details of the impact

Promotion of Youth Development and Professional Competence of Workers

Based on the positive evaluations of the initial and extension phases, the Hong Kong Jockey Club Charities Trust provided a grant of HK\$22.35M to Prof. Daniel Shek (and PolyU as the lead institution) to develop programs for the community-based P.A.T.H.S. project (P.A.T.H.S. III) from 2015 to 2019. This stage of the program benefitted 73,439 students. The research team used the findings and experiences of the initial and extension phases to design intervention programs, training, and evaluation. As the final report to the funding body demonstrates, the P.A.T.H.S. program promotes life skills (such as better resilience and emotional management skills) and well-being and helps to manage problem behaviors [S1]. According to the accounts of the students involved, the program promotes psychosocial competence, life satisfaction, and success [S1, p.4–5], and also benefits their emotional quotient (EQ), adversity quotient (AQ), and spiritual quotient (SQ) [S1, p.71–72]. An overwhelming majority of teachers agreed that the program encouraged the development of various life skills and general well-being [S1, p.73]. The Hong Kong Jockey Club Charities Trust also affirmed the important positive impact of the program on students, teachers, schools, Hong Kong, China, and the world [S1, p.173, and p.181-188].

During P.A.T.H.S. III, we trained 2,085 teachers and social workers in Hong Kong. Nearly all (98%) of the teachers agreed that the training promoted their understanding of youth development and ways to foster positive attitudes in young people; 97% of the teachers maintained that the training promoted self-reflection and a better understanding of the factors that determine the quality of teaching [S1, p.123–124]. The 425 written comments that the teachers provided on the training program were also overwhelmingly positive: they felt it contributed to their professional development [S1, p.136–147], and its interactive nature encouraged reflection [S1, p.148–151].

Program Benefits Affirmed and Program Recommended by the Government

The program was identified as an anti-poverty initiative by the Poverty Commission during the first administration of the HKSAR government, and that status was maintained from 2013 to 2019. In the Report of the Commission on Poverty (2006), P.A.T.H.S. is presented as a screening and developmental program that promotes the holistic development and learning motivation of poor school children, and will eventually “lift them from poverty” (p. 42). P.A.T.H.S. was also recognized by the government as a program that could help to prevent adolescent suicide. In the Second Report of the Child Fatality Review Panel published by the Social Welfare Department in 2015 [S2], P.A.T.H.S. is described as a program that promote “students’ social and emotional competence” (p.44), “students’ competence in building up a healthy bonding” (p.49), “students’ resilience” (p.51), and “students’ proper values as well as promoting an optimistic attitude in facing life adversities” (p.84). The Third Report of the Child Fatality Review Panel, published by the Social Welfare Department in 2017 [S3], also notes that the program “aims at instilling in students proper value as well as promoting an optimistic attitude in facing life adversities” (p.55).

The benefits and social impacts of P.A.T.H.S. were praised by the principal officials and Chairman of the Commission on Youth of the HKSAR government at an international conference held in 2016 [S4]. The Secretary for Security said that the program “demonstrated its effectiveness in promoting the development of positive attitude among young people and enhancing their self-efficacy and resilience” (p.7). The Secretary for Home Affairs observed that the program “is an evidence-based program with a high level of scientific rigor. Its successful implementation experience helps build community capacity in terms of positive youth development and brings useful insights for the Government and relevant stakeholders in planning youth enhancement initiatives” (p.8). The government strongly encourages schools to adopt the P.A.T.H.S. program as a means of curricular and/or extra-curricular youth enrichment.

Promotion of Student Well-Being and Teacher Competence outside Hong Kong

The positive evaluations of the Project P.A.T.H.S. in Hong Kong and East China have led to the full implementation of the Tin Ka Ping P.A.T.H.S. Project, which began in 2014. The Tin Ka Ping Foundation provided research grant (HK\$9.26M) to Prof. Daniel Shek (Principal Investigator) and PolyU (the lead institution) to develop indigenous curriculum materials in Mainland China, train teachers, support the implementation of the program in 33 schools and evaluate its success. Relying on the research findings and experiences gained in Hong Kong, and in collaboration with colleagues in Mainland China, the PolyU team developed indigenous junior secondary school programs. In 2014–15, four training programs were conducted for teachers, and in 2015–2018, the program was implemented in 33 Tin Ka Ping schools in Mainland China, benefitting 82,553 students. The foundation agreed with the view outlined in the final report that the program promoted the life skills of the students and competence of the teacher [S5, p.1–4]. In a special issue of a social work journal, teachers gave their impressions of the program and maintained that it was beneficial to the students, teachers, schools, communities, and the nation [S6]. One teacher wrote that “the P.A.T.H.S. curriculum provides a meritorious educational context that i) contributes to the personal development of the students, and ii) sets the stage which facilitates self-development and transcendence amongst the students” [S6, p. 278]. As a result of the positive impact of the program, eight base schools and 21 project schools were established in 2019 to provide support for 35 partner schools in various parts

of Mainland China. All received support from the local education bureau to implement the P.A.T.H.S. program. In 2018, with the support of the Education Bureau, Qiannan Tin Ka Ping School in Duyun, Qiannan, took the initiative to train teachers from other schools to adopt the P.A.T.H.S. program in their curriculum. The positive social impact of the program has been featured in the media [S7, 2.1–2.4]. Due to its overwhelmingly positive impact, the research team has been invited to conduct further evaluative research in 2019–2022 [S7, p.32–34].

The program has had an international impact. First, it was identified by the World Health Organization (INSPIRE) as an effective program for the promotion of life skills in young people and a necessary resource for those working with adolescents within and outside Hong Kong [S8, p.9 and p.74]. Second, colleagues in other countries have adapted, or plan to adapt, the P.A.T.H.S. program. With funding from UNICEF, colleagues in Sri Lanka have piloted the program in several schools. They plan to implement the program in schools and children’s homes in 2020, benefitting approximately 14,000 children [S8, p.109]. Save the Children Sweden has applied for a grant from the EU to develop the Swedish version of the program [S8, p.110]. Third, according to a report by Youth Power Learning, which “presents the results of a rigorous analysis of existing evidence of positive youth development (PYD) in low- and middle-income countries (LMICs)” [S9, p.1], P.A.T.H.S. is an effective program, based on a wide range of evaluative measures, which promotes youth well-being [S9, p.29]. Finally, a group of internationally renowned researchers have determined that the Chinese Positive Youth Development Scale developed in this program is a valid and reliable measure of PYD [S10, p.76–78] that can be used by youth researchers and practitioners.

(5) Sources to corroborate the impact

[S1] Completion Report submitted to the Hong Kong Jockey Club Charities Trust (June 2019) and the Case Study to be published by the Funding Body (upcoming).

[S2] Child Fatality Review Panel (2015). Second Report for Child Death Cases in 2010-2011. Hong Kong: Social Welfare Department.

[S3] Child Fatality Review Panel (2017). Third Report for Child Death Cases in 2012-2013. Hong Kong: Social Welfare Department.

[S4] Department of Applied Social Sciences (2012). International Conference on “Building a Better Future for Young People.” Hong Kong: The Hong Kong Polytechnic University

[S5] Tin Ka Ping P.A.T.H.S. Project. (2018). Completion Report submitted to Tin Ka Ping Foundation. Hong Kong: Department of Applied Social Sciences, The Hong Kong Polytechnic University (in Chinese).

[S6] Shek, D.T.L., Han, X.Y., & Leung, T.Y. (2018). Special Issue on Tin Ka Ping P.A.T.H.S. Project in China. *Review on Child, Youth and Family Social Work*, 5, 1–317 (in Chinese).

[S7] Tin Ka Ping P.A.T.H.S. Project (2019). Examples of awards, news clippings, papers written by teachers and donation letters. Hong Kong: Department of Applied Social Sciences, The Hong Kong Polytechnic University.

[S8] World Health Organization (2016). *INSPIRE: Seven strategies for ending violence against children*. Geneva: World Health Organization Press (with impact on Sri Lanka and Sweden attached at the end of the report).

[S9] Alvarado, G., Skinner, M., Plaut, D., Moss, C., Kapungu, C., & Reavley, N. (2017). *A systematic review of positive youth development programs in low-and middle-income countries*. Washington, DC: Youth Power Learning, Making Cents International.

[S10] Hinson, L., Kapungu, C., Jessee, C., Skinner, M., Bardini, M., & Evans-Whipp, T. (2016). *Measuring positive youth development toolkit: A guide for implementers of youth programs*. Washington, DC: YouthPower Learning, Making Cents International.