



An Evaluation of the Detention Centre Programme

A Hong Kong Prisons Department Research Project

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Introduction

Detention Centres are administered under the Detention Centre Ordinance (Cap. 239, Laws of Hong Kong) which came into effect in 1972. Since then, this programme has proved to be a valuable option for the Courts in dealing with young male offenders who are found suitable for such training.

The purposes of the present study are firstly, to evaluate the effectiveness of the Detention Centre programme in deterring young offenders from committing further crimes, and secondly, to uncover the differences between those who stayed away from crime and those who did not.

The Legislation

In accordance with the legislation under which the survey sample was sentenced, a person of or over 14, but under 21 years of age, who is convicted of an offence may be sentenced to undergo detention in a Detention Centre in lieu of any other sentences.

For the sample in this evaluation, the period of detention was not less than 1 month, and not more than 6 months. Following release from a Detention Centre, an ex-detainee had to undergo a period of six months' statutory supervision.⁽¹⁾ Non-compliance with the terms of supervision could result in being recalled to a Detention Centre for further training.

The Programme

The Detention Centre programme is aimed at providing a detainee with a short but sharp period of training.

The main criteria of suitability for admission are that the offender must (a) have no previous penal institutional experience (the only exception being a former Detention Centre sentence), (b) pass an intelligence test, and (c) be certified as mentally and physically fit to serve a sentence in a Detention Centre.

On admission, a detainee is placed in the induction wing for a minimum of 7 days. During this period, the daily routine, rules and regulations of the Centre are introduced. The purpose behind the training programme is fully explained by the staff, and the detainee's personal problems are tackled at this stage.

Following induction, a detainee is placed in the First Grade. His ability to accept the demands of the programme, as well as indications of behavioural and attitudinal changes are observed closely by the staff with whom he comes into contact. These staff report in writing their assessment of the detainee's overall performance. Any reports of an unsatisfactory nature will ensue in the detainee being interviewed by a senior officer for additional counselling. Sometimes, the senior officer concerned may also assign the detainee to undertake special work tasks.

(1) Since statistics show that some 60% of all reconviction for criminal offences occurred between the 7th & 11th month following discharge, on 1st August, 1977 the statutory supervision period was extended to become one year following discharge.

The case of every detainee is reviewed by a special board at monthly intervals. The board comprises a senior Prisons official based at Headquarters who is in overall charge of Detention Centres, the Superintendent of the centre, the Medical Officer, and an officer on after-care duties. This board considers and decides on the suitability of a detainee for promotion to a higher grade and eventually recommends his release. The board will also make recommendations for those who are considered to be failing to meet the demands of the programme.

The daily routine in a Detention Centre calls for total involvement and unceasing activity except for breaks after meals and during recreational hours. Strenuous physical labour, foot-drill and physical education form the main part of the programme. Since the opening of the first Detention Centre in June, 1972, parties of detainees have built, during their working hours, a 800' x 10' sea-defence wall along the Shek Pik Beach.

From the time of admission, a detainee is assigned to an after-care officer who establishes strong rapport between himself, the detainee, and the detainee's family to work together in the rehabilitative process. The after-care officer gives frequent counselling to the detainee, and it is also the officer's responsibility to make post-release arrangements for him.

Although communication between detainees is forbidden except at certain periods of time, speaking one's mind is encouraged during weekly group counselling sessions. This gives the detainees an opportunity to ventilate their feelings and exchange opinions about current affairs.

Before being released from a Detention Centre, a Supervision Order is served on a detainee. The terms of the Supervision Order require the detainee to a) inform his after-care officer of any change in place of residence or occupation, b) lead an honest life and not to associate with known bad characters including members of unlawful societies, c) obey the instructions of his after-care officer and to consult him whenever necessary, d) see his after-care officer in person at least once every month, e) remain at home or other designated place between 11:00 p.m. and 6:00 a.m. every night unless otherwise authorized, and f) keep away from all undesirable places frequented by triad or gang members. The Board of Review reserves the right to alter the terms of supervision for the benefit of individual detainees.

Breach of supervision may result in being recalled for further training.

Definition of a successful case

An ex-detainee who, from the date of his release from a Detention Centre to the end of 3 years, has no record of conviction for a criminal offence is classified as a successful case.

Information on reconviction of an ex-detainee is supplied by the Criminal Record Office of the Royal Hong Kong Police Force.

Sample under evaluation

The present sample includes all ex-detainees who had completed their six months' statutory supervision and a 2½ years follow-up period on 30.6.77. The sample size is 698, and according to the criterion stated above, 490 or 70.2% are successful cases, and 208 or 29.8% are failures.

Differences Between Success and Failures

1. Educational attainment

No significant difference exists between the successes and failures as the majority of both groups have received upper primary education. (see Table 1)

Table 1 Educational Attainment

<i>Educational Level</i>	<i>Successes</i>		<i>Failures</i>	
	No.	%	No.	%
No Schooling	1	(0.2)	2	(1.0)
Lower Primary	43	(8.8)	33	(15.9)
Upper Primary	294	(60.0)	123	(59.1)
Lower Secondary	135	(27.5)	45	(21.6)
Upper Secondary	17	(3.5)	5	(2.4)
Total	490	(100.0)	208	(100.0)

$$X^2 = 3.553$$

$$df = 2$$

$$P = 0.1$$

2. Number of siblings

The successes come from families with more siblings than the failures, and the difference is of statistical significance. (see Table 2)

Table 2 Number of Siblings

<i>Number</i>	<i>Successes</i>		<i>Failures</i>	
	No.	%	No.	%
Nil	22	(4.5)	18	(8.7)
1	34	(7.0)	14	(6.7)
2	44	(9.0)	22	(10.6)
3	71	(14.5)	35	(16.8)
4	103	(21.0)	44	(21.1)
5	91	(18.6)	40	(19.2)
6	78	(15.9)	18	(8.7)
7	30	(6.1)	11	(5.3)
8	8	(1.6)	2	(1.0)
9	6	(1.2)	3	(1.4)
10 & over	3	(0.6)	1	(0.5)
Total	490	(100.0)	208	(100.0)

$$\bar{X}_S = 4.14$$

$$\bar{X}_F = 3.74$$

$$t = 2.416$$

$$df = 696$$

$$P = 0.1$$

Perhaps siblings play quite an important part in helping some of the successes stay on the right track.

3. Age on admission

The mean ages at admission for the successes and failures are 16.6 and 16.5 respectively — the difference is not statistically significant. (see Table 3)

Table 3 **Age at Admission**

<i>Age Grouping</i>	<i>Successes</i>		<i>Failures</i>	
	No.	%	No.	%
14	21	(4.3)	11	(5.3)
15	75	(15.3)	38	(18.3)
16	150	(30.6)	63	(30.3)
17	146	(29.8)	56	(26.9)
18	52	(10.6)	15	(7.2)
19	29	(5.9)	17	(8.2)
20	17	(3.5)	8	(3.8)
Total	490	(100.0)	208	(100.0)
	$\bar{X}_S = 16.6$		$\bar{X}_F = 16.5$	

$t = 0.564$ $df = 696$ $P = 0.1$

4. Offence on Admission

A significantly higher percentage of the successes were originally convicted for being members of triad societies. (see Table 4)

Table 4 **Offence on Admission**

<i>Offence</i>	<i>Successes</i>		<i>Failures</i>	
	No.	%	No.	%
Against Lawful Authority	117	(23.9)	21	(10.1)
Against Public Morality	26	(5.3)	6	(2.9)
Against the Person	31	(6.3)	15	(7.2)
Against Property	302	(61.7)	132	(63.5)
Against Penal Code	4	(0.8)	22	(10.6)
Against Local Laws	5	(1.0)	7	(3.3)
Narcotic Offence	5	(1.0)	5	(2.4)
Total	490	(100.0)	208	(100.0)

$X^2 = 60.313$ $df = 6$ $P = 0.1$

This possibly means that being sentenced to detention centres has helped to extricate many of the ex-detainees from the tentacles of triad/gang influences. Such an assumption is supported by the fact that of the 21 persons in the failure group who were charged with being members of triad societies, only 1 was charged with the same offence on reconversion (see Table 5). On the other hand a significantly large number (68) who had been convicted of offences against property on admission were reconvicted on the same type of offences. This appears to indicate that immediate economic gains still play an important part in motivating the commission of an offence.

Table 5

Offence on reconviction by offence on admission (Failures only)
Offence on reconviction

OFFENCE ON ADMISSION	Against Lawful Authority	Against Public Morality	Against The Person	Against Property	Against Penal Code	Against Local Laws	Narcotic Offence	Total
Against Lawful Authority	1			7	1	6	6	21
Against Public Morality	2	1		2			1	6
Against The Person	4		1	5	1	1	3	15
Against Property	18	1	9	68	8	9	19	132
Against Penal Code	4	2		8	1	1	6	22
Against Local Laws			1	5			1	7
Narcotic Offence	1			2		1	1	5
Total	30	4	11	97	11	18	37	208

5. Number of convictions prior to Detention Centre admission

81.6% of the successes compared with 66.8% of the failures had no record of previous convictions (see Table 6). This difference is of statistical significance.

Table 6 Number of Previous Convictions on Criminal Offence
Number of Convictions

	<i>Successes</i>		<i>Failures</i>	
	No.	%	No.	%
Nil	400	(81.6)	139	(66.8)
1	76	(15.5)	57	(27.4)
2	13	(22.7)	8	(3.9)
3	1	(0.2)	4	(1.9)
Total	490	(100.0)	208	(100.0)

t = 4.33 df = 696 P = 0.1

6. Triad element

It is of statistical significance that a higher percentage of the failures professed to be members of triad societies (see Table 7).

Table 7 Triad Element

	<i>Successes</i>		<i>Failures</i>	
	No.	%	No.	%
Triad Member	316	(64.5)	148	(71.2)
Non-triad Member	174	(35.5)	60	(28.8)
Total	490	(100.0)	208	(100.0)

$X^2 = 2.892$ df = 1 P = 0.1

This again indicates that the failures are more involved in the criminal subculture.

7. Frequency of visits received

The successes received more visits from their families than the failures (see Table 8).

Table 8 Frequency of Visits Received
Frequency on a monthly basis

	<i>Successes</i>		<i>Failures</i>	
	No.	%	No.	%
Nil	6	(1.2)	3	(1.4)
Less than once	51	(10.4)	40	(19.2)
Once to less than twice	243	(49.6)	111	(53.4)
Twice	190	(38.8)	54	(26.0)
Total	490	(100.0)	208	(100.0)

$\bar{X}_S = 1.57$ $\bar{X}_F = 1.42$

t = 3.823 df = 696 P = 0.1

A show of concern by the family can serve as a catalyst in the rehabilitative process.

8. Length of detention

Comparatively speaking, the successes were detained for a somewhat shorter period than the failures (see Table 9).

Table 9 Length of Detention

<i>Length of Detention</i>	<i>Successes</i>		<i>Failures</i>	
	No.	%	No.	%
1 to less than 2 months	9	(1.8)	1	(0.5)
2 to less than 3 months	47	(9.6)	5	(2.4)
3 to less than 4 months	168	(34.3)	71	(34.1)
4 to less than 5 months	153	(31.2)	71	(34.1)
5 to less than 6 months	113	(23.1)	60	(28.9)
Total	490	(100.0)	208	(100.0)
	$\bar{X}_S = 4.14$		$\bar{X}_F = 4.38$	
$t = 3.063$	$df = 696$	$P = 0.1$		

Since a detainee's length of detention is determined by the quality of his overall performance, the failures' longer period of detention can be regarded as an indication of their inability to respond to the programme in a positive manner.

9. Disposal on discharge

Significant differences exist between the two groups in this respect (see Table 10).

Table 10 Final Disposal on Discharge

<i>Disposal</i>	<i>Successes</i>		<i>Failures</i>	
	No.	%	No.	%
Skilled Labourer	329	(67.1)	156	(75.0)
Unskilled Labourer	92	(18.8)	19	(9.1)
Worker in Services	25	(5.1)	6	(2.9)
Clerical Worker & Salesmen	16	(3.3)	15	(7.2)
Farmers & Fishermen	17	(3.5)	7	(3.3)
Students	6	(1.2)	2	(1.0)
Unemployed due to sickness	3	(0.6)	1	(0.5)
Others	2	(0.4)	2	(1.0)
Total	490	(100.0)	208	(100.0)
$X^2 = 17.557$	$df = 7$	$P = 0.1$		

10. Living arrangement on discharge

More failures than successes lived with either one or both parents, however the difference is not significant (see Table 11).

Table 11 Living Arrangement on Discharge

<i>Living Arrangement</i>	<i>Successes</i>		<i>Failures</i>	
	No.	%	No.	%
With Father	23	(4.7)	9	(4.3)
With Mother	48	(9.8)	24	(11.5)
With Both Parents	330	(67.3)	150	(72.1)
Dormitory at Place of Work	62	(12.7)	17	(8.2)
Relative	18	(3.7)	5	(2.4)
Wife	5	(1.0)	1	(0.5)
Discharged Prisoners' Aid Society Hostels	4	(0.8)	2	(1.0)
Total	490	(100.0)	208	(100.0)

$X^2 = 4.786$ $df = 6$ $P = 0.1$

Discussion

The success rate of 70.2% reflects that the Detention Centre programme has definitely been an economic as well as effective means of promoting rehabilitation of young offenders whose involvement in criminal pursuit is not ingrained : economic in the sense that the average length of detention is only 4 months, and effective in that the rate of reconviction for criminal offences is relatively low.

