

# **A Study on the Recovery Process of Inmates with History of Drug Abuse: Challenges and Opportunities**

## **Executive Summary**

### *Introduction*

1. The HKU team obtained funding from the Beat Drugs Fund (BDF) Association to conduct a study on the recovery process of offenders with history of drug abuse.
2. This research project aims to explore characteristics of offenders with drug-abuse behaviour, examine the rehabilitation process for offenders with drug-abuse behaviour, identify potential mechanisms to improve the rehabilitation outcomes and estimate the reduction in social costs relating to potential improvements in the rehabilitation process. This report provides an overview of the complex problems of drug-related crime and recall, and details our work in the project, concluding with recommendations.

### *Landscape of drug treatment and rehabilitation system*

3. Incarceration and recovery are not a linear process, instead it is a series of complex sub-systems with stakeholders (i.e., Department of Justice, Hospital Authority, Social Welfare Department, Correctional Services Department (CSD), Non-Governmental Organization, Family) interactively impact one another, especially in cases of recall. To optimize the system and to bring effective rehabilitative outcomes, it is apparent that stakeholders need to communicate and coordinate activities in a manner that acknowledges the interdependence of detection, law enforcement, treatment, and rehabilitation, consistent with a complex adaptive system approach.

### *The treatment and rehabilitation support for younger-age drug users in CSD: effectiveness and determinants*

4. The present study explored the recall and reoffend risk of offenders with drug use behaviour aged 30 or below in Hong Kong. The results indicated that approximately 58% of the DATC offenders were recalled during the 12 months supervision period. Of those recalled, about 78% are recalled due to drug relapse.
5. Regression testing was used to find out factors relating to recall and reoffending. Results suggest that (i) age, (ii) marital status, (iii) conviction history, (iv) attendance of rehabilitation programmes and (v) visitation during incarceration are closely associated with recall and/or reoffending. It is noteworthy that offenders having a strong social support network (i.e., greater visitation from family and friends) showed a lower risk of recall.
6. A higher risk of recall for offenders who have attended more rehabilitation programmes was identified. While this seems counter-intuitive, it may be that the participants were at higher risk before attending the programme, and that these programmes could not fully negate this heightened risk.

### *Interview-based exploration of the treatment and rehabilitative process*

7. Interviews were used to elucidate the strengths in the existing drug rehabilitation and treatment system for offenders as well as areas for improvement.
8. The positives include the use of pre-existing resources available from community stakeholders such as court outreach and duty lawyer schemes that aim to provide support to service users before trials. Counselling and career mentoring at the correctional stage were also impactful.
9. Regarding the areas for improvement, services could be made more efficient through enhanced coordination between different stakeholders in the system. This included (i) setting up referral mechanisms to connect arrestees to community resources earlier, (ii) setting up an updated legal protocol with key guidance from different disciplines, and (iii) strengthening coordination between different parties during the process of community re-integration.

### *Potential reduction in social costs related to improvement in the rehabilitation system*

10. Potential reduction in social costs relating to the potential improvement in the rehabilitation process with reference to Enhanced Probation Services (EPS) was calculated. Avoiding one recall case for each inmate will potentially save HK\$161,628 in 2021, consisting of crime cost of HK\$140,178 and loss of productivity of HK\$21,450.

### *Recommendations*

11. The research team has made five key recommendations to improve treatment and rehabilitation system with a view to preventing drug problems from deteriorating or from degrading into a long-term problem that leads to recurring reoffending, and significant social, medical, and economic costs. First, enhance individual risk and needs assessments. Second, foster positive social networks for offenders. Third, evaluate existing rehabilitation programmes. Fourth, increase post-discharge support. Finally, strengthen clinical and community partnerships.