



Police and social work preventions of offending among at-risk youth in Shanghai

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ABSTRACT

The effectiveness of police disciplining and social work counseling in preventing offending of at-risk youth has been unclear. For elucidating the prevention regarding theft and fighting, this study analyzes 1702 retrospective event history cases from 297 at-risk youths identified in the Chinese metropolis of Shanghai. Herein, the event history refers to theft, fighting, police disciplining, and social work counseling happening in the youth's age of 11 years through 18 years. The analysis reveals that the interventions of police disciplining and social work counseling, both in the previous year, demonstrated significant negative effects on fighting and theft respectively. Furthermore, combination of the two interventions generated a significant negative interaction effect on theft. These findings exemplify elasticity theory by showing that the hard form of police disciplining and the soft form of social work counseling are complementary in preventing offending. The findings imply the worth of promoting the interventions selectively to prevent hard and soft offending such as fighting and stealing respectively.

Considering the uncertain contributions of police disciplining and social work counseling to preventing offending among at-risk youth, empirical research is imperative to address the uncertainty. At-risk youth refer to people below 22 years of age identified by social or criminal justice services to have actual or potential behavioral problems, including runaway, truancy, theft, and fighting. Theft and fighting are offending as they are predatory and harmful to the target (Wilkinson, 2002). The offending and its risks commonly engage prevention by police disciplining and social work counseling (Murray & Graves, 2013). Police disciplining means the police imposing punishments, sanctions, controlling, surveillance, monitoring, interrogation, warning, cautioning, frisking, arrest, and other coercive measures (Ezell, 2007). Social work counseling signifies the social worker advising with various counseling approaches, such as behavioral, cognitive, motivational, humanistic, psychodynamic, and eclectic ones (Skiba, Monroe, & Wodarski, 2004). Conceivably, police disciplining and social work counseling represent hard, coercive and soft, edifying interventions respectively (Dick, 2005; Karoll, 2010). These two interventions are thereby independent, not necessarily related to arrest. Supposedly, police disciplining and social work counseling are effective in preventing youth's offending (Stanton, 2004). However, existing research, which has shown null or countervailing findings, has not adequately verified the supposition (Wiley, Slocum, & Esbensen, 2013). This inadequacy registers the uncertainty about the contributions of police disciplining and social work

counseling to preventing the offending of at-risk youth. The uncertainty thus poses a research question for the present empirical study to address. Specifically, the study seeks to estimate the predictive effects of police disciplining, social work counseling, and their combination one year earlier on the subsequent theft and fighting of the at-risk youth in Shanghai, China. The predictive effects are identifiable from the event history (i.e., time of events in the past) reported by the at-risk youths about their offending and interventions received from the age of 11 to 18 years (Wiesner, Capaldi, & Kim, 2010; Yoder, Whitbeck, & Hoyt, 2001).

The effectiveness of police disciplining and social work counseling in preventing the offending of at-risk youth is in need of investigation in China as well as other places. In the first place, youth's offending, including theft and violence, is growing with modernization and marketization in China (Hao, Guida, Morisky, & Liu, 2015). Such growth is in need of policy and research concerns, including those pertaining to police and social work (Ding, He, Shoptaw, Gao, & Detels, 2014). Meanwhile, the effectiveness of police and social work in preventing youth's offending is largely uncharted and uncertain in China. The uncertainty reflects the lack of broader knowledge about police and social work there. Apparently, existing knowledge suggests that police and social work in China have their distinctiveness due to Chinese culture and sociopolitical structure (Hyde, 2011). Such Chinese distinctiveness includes socialism, authoritarianism, familism, and their emphases on the common good, hierarchy, the extended family, and

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corresponding respect, obedience, and abiding, despite modernization and marketization. Thus, police appear to be both authoritarian and helpful, as viewed by Chinese citizens (Dai, 2008). Social work, in contrast, is relatively new in China, burgeoning since the start of marketization (An & Chapman, 2014). Moreover, social work has its Chinese characteristics of being authoritarian, collectivist, integrative, and educative (Leung & Tam, 2014). As such, social work counseling tends to be directive in giving advice and even commands to the target (Duan et al., 2015). Social work and other preventive services in China tend to grow with modernization, urbanization, or socioeconomic development (An & Chapman, 2014). As such, Shanghai is a crucial research site in China, because of its significance in modernization, offenses, and preventive services (Ding et al., 2014). Notably, the Westernization of Shanghai makes the metropolis a suitable bridge for consolidating knowledge gleaned from China and the West (Orum et al., 2009). Meanwhile, crime figures are national secrets, and interventions are mostly uncharted in China (Ding et al., 2014; Hyde, 2011). This suggests the importance of the present study.

1. Preventive effects of police disciplining and social work counseling

Elucidating the effects of police disciplining and social work counseling in China is theoretically relevant. Essentially, the effects are intriguing considering contradictory theoretical speculations. On the one hand, the effects of the disciplining and counseling are plausible to show deterrence in preventing offending (Bouffard & Piquero, 2010). The effectiveness of deterrence or prevention hinges on systems theory generally. The theory presupposes multiple systems and their cooperation to solve diverse problems (Kibel & Holder, 2003; Skyttner, 2005). Thus, cooperation between police disciplining and social work counseling can raise the effectiveness of either approach. According to the requisite variety principle of systems theory, the effective solution needs to match the nature of the problem. On the other hand, the disciplining and counseling are likely to breed an iatrogenic effect to aggravate the problem. Theoretical reasons include labeling, modeling, and reactance to coercion, control, or influence. The labeling effect is likely to happen given the susceptibility of identity to social labeling derived from reception of intervention (Bales & Mears, 2008). Modeling or learning to offend can also happen through contagion among offenders during intervention (Wiley et al., 2013). Furthermore, the iatrogenic effect can occur as reactance to control and other influences from intervention to limit freedom and enforce compliance (Ennett, Bauman, Foshee, Pemberton, & Hicks, 2001). Resolving the theoretical contradiction between the preventive and iatrogenic effects in China is crucial. Such resolution tends to hinge on modernization, including that in the professions of policing and social work. The modernization would render the professions comparable among modernized societies (An & Chapman, 2014). Notably, professionalization in social work has been rapidly progressing in China for the past decade to emulate international practices (Bai & Daley, 2014). The modernization of police and social work in China, nevertheless, does not guarantee their effectiveness. The Chinese sociocultural characteristics such as authoritarian practice and compliance are likely to sustain the professional effectiveness (Duan et al., 2012). Such effectiveness can contrast with some existing findings about the ineffectiveness of preventive intervention (Savolainen, 2009). Anyhow, the theoretical and empirical uncertainty requires the present work to consolidate, revise, and/or refine existing knowledge.

Some knowledge has informed the supposition about the preventive effects of police disciplining and social work counseling on the youth's offending. On the one hand, the preventive effects may reflect the youth's motivation and effort at prevention by acquiring police and/or social work interventions, and the motivation and effort would sustain the prevention (Ward & Langlands, 2009). That is, the youth may prevent offending actively or purposely through engaging in police and/or

social work services. The purposive action may be sufficient to bolster the prevention (Suchman, Legow, & Mayes, 2008). On the other hand, the preventive effects may embody inputs from police disciplining and social work counseling to enable the prevention (Ward & Langlands, 2009). The inputs encompass various resources and messages conveyed through disciplining and counseling such as guidance, monitoring, threatening, confronting, encouragement, and enlightening (Hyde, 2011). In the case of police disciplining, the inputs may convey information and/or induce experience through coercive ways about the cost of offending and the benefit of eschewing offending (Bazemore, 2001). Such information or knowledge would prevent offending through the learning and/or calculation of the benefit and cost (Wild, Cunningham, & Ryan, 2006). That is, avoiding the cost of offending and/or acquiring the benefit of eschewing offending would underlie the preventive effects. In the case of social work counseling, the inputs may also impart information in overt and/or subtle ways about the reason, value, need, appropriateness, capability, possibility, and/or feasibility for eschewing offending (Karoll, 2010). Hence, police disciplining and social work counseling may prevent offending through engaging the youth's motivation and effort and/or stimulating or empowering the youth through coercive and supple means respectively.

Some research has shown the separate contributions of police disciplining and social work counseling to preventing offending. On the one hand, the contribution of police disciplining has figured in the negative effects of arrest and sanctions on offending (Ezell, 2007). Similarly, imprisonment, supervision, and sanctions have appeared to prevent the offender's recidivism (Bales & Mears, 2008). Moreover, punishment has appeared to deter violence in the youth (Levitt & Lochner, 2001). The threat of legal sanctions also has tended to prevent theft (Blackwell & Eschholz, 2002). Besides, parental monitoring has shown a negative effect on the youth's theft (Strohschein & Matthew, 2015). On the other hand, the contribution of social work counseling has appeared in the negative effects of behavioral or cognitive-behavioral counseling for self-control, skill enhancement, and others on the youth's offending (Farrington & Welsh, 2007). Group counseling has also appeared to prevent the youth's violence (Vitaro, Pedersen, & Brendgen, 2007). Similarly, behavioral, cognitive-behavioral, psychoanalytic, family, and multisystemic counseling have shown their preventive effects on the adult's violence (Dahlberg, 2007). In-home counseling has also exhibited a preventive effect on the offender's recidivism (Ryan & Yang, 2005).

Police disciplining and social work counseling may generate a preventive effect jointly, apart from separately. This joint effect means that police disciplining and social work counseling complement each other in a synergistic way that is extra to their separate effects. The synergy is plausible considering systems theory and its component of elasticity theory. Generally, systems theory envisions the multiplicity of needs and problems such that orchestrating joint efforts or systems to tackle the multiplicity is necessary (Kibel & Holder, 2003; Skyttner, 2005). The theory suggests that a solution with multiple dimensions is necessary to create the condition of redundancy or buffering to make the solution work (Skyttner, 2005). Essentially, the requisite variety principle of systems theory presupposes interaction and cooperation across systems complementarily to tackle multiple dimensions of problems effectively. One simple way to tap the dimensionality, according to elasticity theory, is the identification of hard and soft dimensions involving physical actions and thoughts respectively (Sigurdsson, DeFulio, Long, & Silverman, 2011; Werlin, 2010). Specifically, elasticity theory proposes that a solution combining hard and soft dimensions is especially effective in furnishing the buffer required for viable execution of the solution (Werlin, 2010). For instance, both hard power and soft power need to be present to optimize their effectiveness. In practice, hard power is coercive and soft power is persuasive. Thus, combination of the coercion of police disciplining and the persuasion of social work counseling would be particularly effective, according to elasticity theory.

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