Criminal sentiments and behaviours among young people in Hong Kong

Wing Hong Chui\textsuperscript{a*} and Kevin Kwok-Yin Cheng\textsuperscript{b1}

\textsuperscript{a}Department of Social Work & Social Administration, The University of Hong Kong, Pokfulam, Hong Kong SAR, P.R. China; \textsuperscript{b}Faculty of Law, The Chinese University of Hong Kong, Shatin, Hong Kong SAR, P.R. China

\textit{(Received 30 October 2013; accepted 11 December 2013)}

Criminal attitudes have been found to influence criminal behaviour. Yet this is an understudied area in Hong Kong despite the scholarly interests in youth delinquency. In this study, we tested the relationship between criminal sentiments and social factors and illegal conduct among 942 Chinese youths (aged 14–18) in Hong Kong using the Criminal Sentiments Scale-Modified (CSS-M). The results were mixed. While all the underlying factors of the CSS-M were found to be significant, only negative attitudes towards the Law–Court–Police and Identifications with Criminal Others had a positive relationship. Contrary to expectations, Tolerance for Law Violations had a negative correlation. Moreover, both social factors and criminal attitudes were found to be significant in influencing youths’ criminal behaviour. The results are discussed in the Hong Kong Chinese context.

\textbf{Keywords:} criminal attitudes; criminal behaviours; Criminal Sentiments scale; youth delinquency; Hong Kong

\section*{Introduction}

Like many different jurisdictions around the world, youth crime is a major concern to authorities and the general public in Hong Kong. According to the most updated official statistics, in 2011, 3343 juveniles (aged 10–15)\textsuperscript{2} and 4350 young persons (aged 16–20) were arrested. This is compared with 30,634 young persons aged 21 years and above who were arrested in by the police in 2011. Transfigured to per 100,000, juveniles aged 10–15 and youths aged 16–20 accounted to 809 per 100,000 and 1012 per 100,000 arrested, respectively. For the rest of the population, their arrest rate was only about 534 per 100,000 (Census and Statistics Department, 2012). Such arrest rates have been largely consistent over the past decade. For instance in 2001, the arrest rates for juveniles (10–15) was 779 per 100,000 and for youths (16–20) it was 1357 per 100,000 (Census and Statistics Department, 2012). Youth crime make up approximately 15–18\% of total crime in Hong Kong; a statistic that is similar to Mainland China and the United States (Wong, 2000). Of course, arrest rates only describe crimes that are detected by the police.

Nonetheless, the general perception is that youth crime is a concern in Hong Kong, and this has been true since the 1980s. There was public fear that young people were engaged in property offences, most notably shoplifting, and were recruited into the triads. Jones and Vagg (2007) went further to state that by the mid-1980s, “[t]he word “juvenile” became synonymous with “delinquency”’ (p. 517). While it has been noted by commentators that there are traditionally few criminological debates in Hong Kong (Wong, 2000; Xu, 2011)

\textsuperscript{*}Corresponding author. Email: ericchui@hku.hk

© 2014 Taylor & Francis
and that criminology in Hong Kong tend to possess an administrative character that seeks to provide solutions to policy problems (Jones & Vagg, 2007), the study of juvenile delinquency has been a major focus. Chui (2005), for instance, in comprising a bibliography of all papers about criminology and criminal justice in Hong Kong from 1990 to 2004, found that juvenile delinquency was the prevailing topic of inquiry, making up 20% of all papers published. Given the government’s and public’s concern about youth crime, this is hardly a surprising finding.

Major criminological theories developed in the Western context have been applied in Hong Kong using local youth samples. These include the self-control theory (Gottfredson & Hirschi, 1990), social control theory (Hirschi, 1969) and general strain theory (Agnew, 1992). Although criminal attitudes are intrinsic to these theories, less attention has been devoted to specific measurements about criminal attitudes among youths, despite attitudes being found to predict behaviour (Simourd & Olver, 2002). Specifically related to crime, anti-social attitudes have been regarded as one of the main factors that contribute to criminal conduct (Andrews & Bonta, 1994). In this study, we extend the literature on youth delinquency in the Hong Kong Chinese context by measuring the criminal attitudes of 942 youths (aged 14–18) in Hong Kong to determine its effects on criminal behaviour. The results will have implications for cross-cultural measurements of criminal sentiments and criminal behaviour.

Studies on youth delinquency in Hong Kong

As noted, relative to other criminological topics, considerable attention has been given to explore the causes of youth crime in Hong Kong. Most of the studies attributed the cause of delinquency to the social factors of youths, namely familial circumstances, school achievements and peer pressure. In one of the earliest studies of youth crime in Hong Kong, the Hong Kong Government commissioned the Fight Crime Committee to look at the rise of youth crime in the late 1970s. The Committee concluded that the majority of young offenders came from lower socio-economic class, from broken families and did not have much motivation in their schooling (Hong Kong Government, 1981; see Adorjan & Chui, 2014).

Cheung (1997) utilising self-reported surveys of 1139 secondary school students in Hong Kong investigated the connections between familial variables, school variables, peer pressure and media exposure and deviant behaviour. The variables that Cheung (1997) adopted stemmed from established criminological theories. For example, students were asked about their attachment to their parents (social control) and their parents’ and teachers’ negative evaluation of them (labelling theory). Ordinary least squares regression found that peers’ deviant behaviour was the strongest predictor of the participant’s own deviant behaviour. Other significant variables include exposure to violent/obscene content from the media, imitations of media characters, teachers’ negative evaluations and parents’ deviant behaviour.

In a more recent study, Cheung and Cheung (2008) tested Gottfredson and Hirschi’s (1990) self-control theory (general theory of crime) on predicting deviant behaviour among a sample of Chinese secondary school students in Hong Kong while controlling for social factors predicted by social bonding, labelling, strain and differential association. Cheung and Cheung (2008) discovered that a lack of self-control does not influence deviant behaviour when social factors are taken into consideration. Instead, social factors were found to be significant when self-control were included in multivariate analyses. This differed from studies using Western samples that found support for self-control theory (Grasmick, Title, Bursik, & Arneklev, 1993; Pratt & Cullen, 2000) and the proposition that self-control can
predict deviance ‘among all groups and countries’ (Gottfredson, 2006, p. 83). Cheung and Cheung (2008) postulated that the more collectivistic Chinese culture may make social factors more salient compared with the individualistic culture of the West.

Besides samples of secondary school students, other studies employed various samples. Ngai and Cheung (2005) examined the effects of a variety of factors such as social attachments, perceived social inequality and background characteristics on delinquency in 229 marginal youths from ages 15 to 23 recruited through youth outreach teams in Hong Kong. The study found attachment to work to be influential in reducing the likelihood of engaging in illegal conduct for marginalised youths. Focusing exclusively on youth gang involvement in Hong Kong, Guangzhou and Shanghai, Ngai, Cheung, and Ngai (2007) found parental control and cognitive development to be better inhibitors of youth gang involvement for youths in Hong Kong.

Two recent Hong Kong studies that took pro-offending attitudes and attitudes about the legal system into measuring delinquent activity are worth noting. The first is a study conducted by Chui and Chan (2012a) on the effects of social bonds on violent behaviour and theft for secondary school students in Hong Kong. Included in the measures was belief in the legal system that comprised four items that gauged confidence in the police and tolerance for law-breaking behaviour. It was found that a belief in the legal acted as a protective factor against youths from engaging in both violence and theft. The second study also performed by Chui and Chan (2012b) looked specifically at recidivism of juvenile male probationers in Hong Kong. It was found that pro-offending attitudes were an indicator of the likelihood of recidivism. Pro-offending attitudes included anticipation for re-offending, victim hurt denial and a perception that committing crime is worthwhile.

**Criminal attitudes and behaviour**

From social psychology research, attitudes have been found to be a constant predictor of behaviour. The two theories of reasoned action (Ajzen & Fishbein, 1980) and the theory of planned behaviour (Ajzen, 1991) really underscore this causality. The notion is that individuals contrive rational decisions as to participate or engage in certain behaviour based on the said individual’s intention to engage in that behaviour. The individual’s intention is premised upon the decision-maker’s attitude towards the behaviour; i.e., evaluations of the advantages and disadvantages of engaging in the behaviour in question, approval of the behaviour by others (subjective norm) and by the perceived control that one has over the behaviour in question (self-efficacy) (Ajzen, 1991). As discussed, attitudes are rooted in the major criminological theories and are considered as one of the main causes of delinquency (Simourd & Van De Ven, 1999).

One challenge in measuring criminal attitudes and its effects on delinquent behaviour is having a viable instrument (Simourd & Van De Ven, 1999). An instrument that has shown promise in this regard is the Criminal Sentiments Scale (CSS) (Gendreau, Grant, Leipciger, & Collins, 1979). The Criminal Sentiments Scale and the modified version (CSS-M) (Shields & Simourd, 1991) has been used repeatedly to gauge the attitudes of a variety of samples, including violent offenders, property offenders, sex offenders and incarcerated young offenders in the Western context and has been found to be a successful instrument in capturing offending behaviour (Shields & Simourd, 1991; Simourd, 1997; Simourd & Olver, 2002; Witte, Di Placido, Gu, & Wong, 2006). The CSS-M has three underlying factors: Attitudes towards the Law–Court–Police (LCP), Tolerance for Law Violation (TLV) and Identification with Criminal Others (ICO). The LCP basically measures people’s negative attitudes towards the criminal justice system and its agents.
The TLV assesses justifications of law violations. Lastly, the ICO measures people’s criminal self-concept.

Simourd and Van De Van (1999), for instance, found CSS-M scores to correlate with the re-arrest and re-incarceration rates of a sample of incarcerated adult offenders in Canada. Although in previous works (e.g., Chui & Chan, 2012b, 2013) there have been some support of the correlations between pro-offending attitudes and criminal behaviour among young offenders in Hong Kong, this study extends the literature by utilising an established measure of criminal attitudes, the CSS-M, and testing the relationship between criminal sentiments and law violations of young people in Hong Kong. This study also took into consideration measures of social factors of youth that have been found to influence delinquent behaviour in the Hong Kong context (e.g., Cheung & Cheung, 2008).

Present study

In this study, we investigated the influence of social factors and criminal attitudes on criminal behaviour among Chinese youths in Hong Kong. Three outcome variables were chosen as indicators of youths’ criminal involvement. The first outcome variable was whether the youth in question has a criminal record. This served to provide a broader view of whether the background of the youths and their criminal attitudes would indicate whether they break the law. The drawback of this measure is that given this is not a longitudinal study, we cannot ascertain whether negative criminal attitudes led to breaking the law or whether being convicted spurred negative criminal sentiments. To substantiate this, the second outcome variable measured the number of convictions. This variable was similar to the measure of recidivism used in previous CSS-M studies (e.g., Simourd & Olver, 2002). Repeated convictions would indicate a propensity to engage in illegal activity. The last variable of whether the participant has committed a crime before regardless of whether they were caught or convicted was utilised to overcome the problem of undetected criminal behaviour. It is hypothesised that greater anti-social attitudes and criminal sentiments would be associated with greater criminal behaviour.

Methods

Participants

In total, 942 young people in Hong Kong were recruited for this study. The participants’ age ranged from 14 to 18 with a mean age of 16.33 (SD = 1.12). Slightly over half of the participants (N = 512; 54.4%) were males with the rest (N = 429; 45.5%) females. In terms of educational level, 180 (19.1%) attained an education of lower secondary school (Form 3 or below), 674 (71.5%) had attained upper secondary education (Form 4–6) and 86 (9.1%) with vocational training. The income level of the participants varied. That is, 674 participants (71.5%) reported having an average monthly income (including pocket money) of less than HK$2500 over the past 12 months, 123 (13.1%) from HK$2500 to $4999, 83 (8.8%) HK$5000 to $9999, 37 (3.9%) HK$10,000 to $19,999 and only 12 (1.3%) participants reported earning an income of HK$20,000 or above. It should be noted that not all numbers add up to the total because some participants did not answer all questions. All participants were ethnically Chinese.

Measures

Three variables served as indicators of youths’ criminal involvement: whether they had been convicted before, the number of convictions and whether they had committed a crime
before (regardless of whether they were arrested or convicted). The majority of the participants reported that they had never been convicted of a crime before ($N = 796; 84.5\%$) with the rest having had a criminal conviction ($N = 139; 14.8\%$). The number of convictions of the sample ranged from 0 to 9, with a mean of 0.22 (SD = 0.77). To overcome the problem of undetected criminality, participants were also asked to self-report any illegal activity regardless if they had been caught or not. Most participants ($N = 712; 75.6\%$) reported that they had never committed a crime with the rest ($N = 228; 24.2\%$) stating that they have. Again, not all numbers add up to the total because some participants did not answer all questions.

The CSS-M (Shields & Simourd, 1991) was used to assess youths’ criminal attitudes. The CSS-M contains 41 items measured on a three-point Likert scale ($0 = $agree; $1 = $undecided or cannot make up your mind; $2 = $disagree). The items can be categorised into five underlying factors: Attitudes Toward the Law, Attitudes Toward the Court, Attitudes Towards Police, TLV, and ICO. The first three factors can be combined to form the LCP subscale. The LCP assesses people’s respect for the criminal justice system. Sample items include ‘All laws should be obeyed just because they are laws’ and ‘Life would be better with fewer cops (reversed scored).’ A higher score would reflect a greater negative attitude towards the law and criminal justice authorities. The TLV measures justifications for criminal conducts. Sample items include ‘There is never a good reason to break the law’ and ‘Most people would commit crimes if they wouldn’t get caught (reversed scored).’ Finally, the ICO measures a person’s criminal self-concept. Sample items include ‘No one who breaks the law can be my friend’ and ‘People who have been in trouble with the law are more like me than people who don’t have trouble with the law (reverse scored).’ Overall, a higher score on the CSS-M would indicate a stronger anti-social attitude and greater criminal sentiments.

Besides the demographic variables outlined above (age, gender, educational level and monthly income), information about the participants’ family backgrounds was also asked. It was felt that a young person’s familial background may attribute to their criminal activity. Three variables were captured: the participants’ type of housing (private or publically funded) and whether their father and/or mother have previously committed any crimes. Most of the youths in our sample ($N = 560; 59.4\%$) reported to live in publically funded housing, including the Home Ownership Scheme, which is a government subsidised housing scheme. The rest of the participants ($N = 375; 39.8\%$) had private living accommodations. Only 65 youths (6.9\%) stated that their father had committed a crime before, and 31 youths (3.3\%) indicated that their mother had previously committed a crime.

**Procedure**

The questionnaire with all the measures was translated into Chinese through a forward and backward translation procedure. Participants were recruited with the assistance of social workers and secondary school teachers around Hong Kong. Prior to the commencement of the questionnaire, the purpose and procedure of the study were explained to the participants. Ethical approval was obtained by the authors’ university before any data collection.

The data were all coded into SPSS for Windows (IBM). Whether the youth had previously been convicted was coded as a dichotomous variable ($1 = $convicted; $0 = $never convicted). The number of convictions was coded as a continuous variable. Whether the participant had committed any crimes, regardless of being caught or not, was
also coded as a dichotomous variable (1 = committed crime; 0 = never committed a crime). Age was coded as a continuous variable, gender as dichotomous (1 = female; 0 = male), and education and income levels were treated as ordinal variables. The variables relating to family background were dichotomous as well: type of housing (1 = private housing; 0 = publically funded) and father/mother crime history (1 = committed a crime; 0 = never committed a crime). Lastly, the CSS-M was coded according to the three-point Likert scale discussed above and the three underlying factors were retained.

Results
The CSS-M scale and the three underlying subscales demonstrated good internal reliability. The Cronbach $\alpha$ for the aggregate CSS-M scale was 0.87 and had a mean score of 0.75 (SD = 0.27). For the LCP subscale, the $\alpha$ was 0.83 and a mean score was 0.74 (SD = 0.30). The TLV had an $\alpha$ of 0.69 and a mean score of 0.80 (SD = 0.36). The ICO had an $\alpha$ of 0.62 and a mean score of 0.75 (SD = 0.27).

All three subscales also showed significant correlations with each other and with the aggregate CSS-M scale as well. The inter-scale correlations of the LCP, TLV, ICO and CSS-M are presented in Table 1.

Regression analyses
Conviction record
To test which variables would affect the criminal behaviour among youths in Hong Kong, a series of regression analyses were performed for the three outcome variables. For each regression analysis, three models were tested. In Model 1, only the demographic information and family background variables of the participants were included in the regression. In Model 2, only the three subscales of the CSS-M were included in the analysis. Lastly, in Model 3, all the independent models were incorporated into the analysis.

For the first outcome variable of whether the youth in question had ever been convicted of a criminal offence, a series of binary logistic regressions were performed. The results are presented in Table 2. In Model 1, all variables regarding the demographic characteristics of the youths were found to be significant. The older the participants were, the more likely they would have a conviction record. Females were less likely as males to have a conviction. Education level negatively correlated with the likelihood of a conviction record while, somewhat surprisingly, income level demonstrated a positive association. The more income that the youth had, the more likely they would have a criminal conviction. Lastly, the type of living accommodation mattered as well, with those

| Table 1. Intercorrelation of the CSS-M subscales and scale. |
|-------------|-------|------|-------|-------|
|             | LCP   | TLV  | ICO   | CSS-M |
| LCP         | 1.00  |      |       |       |
| TLV         | 0.54**| 1.00 |       |       |
| ICO         | 0.48**| 0.55**| 1.00 |       |
| CSS-M       | 0.92**| 0.79**| 0.69**| 1.00 |

Note: **p < 0.01.
living in private housing to be less likely to have a conviction compared with youths living in public housing.

In Model 2, only the three subscales of the CSS-M were inputted into the regression. All three subscales were found to be statistically significant. The only surprising result is the TLV which showed a negative association with having a conviction. The less tolerate that participants had for law violations, the more likely that they had been convicted before. The other two factors were consistent with previous assumptions. The more negative view the youth has about the criminal justice system and the more that the youth identified with criminal others, the more likely he/she had a criminal conviction.

In Model 3, all the independent variables were inputted into the regression. Most of the demographic variables remained significant with the exception of age. All three factors of the CSS-M continued to show significance with having criminal conviction.

### Number of convictions

In the second set of regressions, the outcome variable of the number of convictions was tested. The results of the regression models are presented in Table 3. Again, in Model 1, only the demographic and familial variables were inserted into the regression model. Age was found to be significant as the older the youth, the more number of convictions that the

| B (SD) | Model 1 | Model 2 | Model 3 |
|--------|---------|---------|---------|
| Age    | 0.09 (0.03)** | 0.07 (0.02)** |         |
| Gender | -0.11 (0.05)* | -0.08 (0.05) |         |
| Education level | -0.51 (0.05)** | -0.44 (0.06)** |         |
| Income | 0.18 (0.03)** | 0.16 (0.03)** |         |
| Housing type | -0.06 (0.05) | -0.05 (0.05) |         |
| Father committed a crime | 0.43 (0.11)** | 0.40 (0.11)** |         |
| Mother committed a crime | -0.12 (0.15) | -0.10 (0.15) |         |
| LCP    | 0.67 (0.10)** | 0.34 (0.10)** |         |
| TLV    | -0.24 (0.09)** | -0.17 (0.08)* |         |
| ICO    | 0.39 (0.08)** | 0.23 (0.07)** |         |
| Adjusted $R^2$ | 0.22 | 0.11 | 0.24 |

Note: *$p < 0.05$; **$p < 0.01$; ***$p < 0.001$. 

---

Table 2. Logistic regression on conviction record.

| B (SD) | Model 1 | Model 2 | Model 3 |
|--------|---------|---------|---------|
| Age    | 0.32 (0.12)** | 0.21 (0.12) |         |
| Gender | -1.18 (0.29)** | -1.04 (0.31)** |         |
| Education level | -2.95 (0.27)** | -2.60 (0.29)** |         |
| Income | 0.68 (0.12)** | 0.65 (0.13)** |         |
| Housing type | -1.07 (0.31)** | -1.08 (0.33)** |         |
| Father committed a crime | 0.37 (0.45) | 0.18 (0.49) |         |
| Mother committed a crime | 0.31 (0.67) | 0.71 (0.72) |         |
| LCP    | 3.90 (0.45)** | 2.80 (0.55)** |         |
| TLV    | -1.43 (0.39)** | -1.35 (0.50)** |         |
| ICO    | 1.77 (0.34)** | 1.05 (0.44)* |         |
| Nagelkerke $R^2$ | 0.53 | 0.29 | 0.58 |

Note: *$p < 0.05$; **$p < 0.01$; ***$p < 0.001$. 

---

Table 3. Linear regression on number of convictions.

| B (SD) | Model 1 | Model 2 | Model 3 |
|--------|---------|---------|---------|
| Age    | 0.09 (0.03)** | 0.07 (0.02)** |         |
| Gender | -0.11 (0.05)* | -0.08 (0.05) |         |
| Education level | -0.51 (0.05)** | -0.44 (0.06)** |         |
| Income | 0.18 (0.03)** | 0.16 (0.03)** |         |
| Housing type | -0.06 (0.05) | -0.05 (0.05) |         |
| Father committed a crime | 0.43 (0.11)** | 0.40 (0.11)** |         |
| Mother committed a crime | -0.12 (0.15) | -0.10 (0.15) |         |
| LCP    | 0.67 (0.10)** | 0.34 (0.10)** |         |
| TLV    | -0.24 (0.09)** | -0.17 (0.08)* |         |
| ICO    | 0.39 (0.08)** | 0.23 (0.07)** |         |
| Adjusted $R^2$ | 0.22 | 0.11 | 0.24 |

Note: *$p < 0.05$; **$p < 0.01$; ***$p < 0.001$. 

---

International Journal of Adolescence and Youth 63
participant had. Females again were less likely to have convictions compared with males. Education level displayed a negative correlation with the number of convictions, and income level demonstrated a positive relationship. These results were unsurprisingly similar to regression results on whether participants have a criminal conviction or not. What was different was the variable of whether the youths’ father had committed a crime before. Here, this variable was found to have a positive association with the number of convictions. Also, the type of living accommodation was not found to be significant.

In Model 2, all of the three subscales of the CSS-M showed statistical significance. A higher score on LCP and ICO correlated with a higher number of conviction records among youths in Hong Kong. Once more, TLV had a negative association. Contrary to expectations, a greater tolerance for law violations did not positively relate to the number of convictions, instead it demonstrated a negative association.

In Model 3, the variables related demographic characteristics, except for gender, retained their significance. Again, having a father who committed a crime before was positively related to youths having a higher number of convictions. The subscales about criminal attitudes were also found to be of significance with the TLV having a negative correlation and the LCP and ICO displaying a positive relationship.

**Committed a crime**

The final outcome variable asked participants to self-report whether they have committed a crime before regardless of whether they were caught or convicted. Table 4 presents the results of this final set of regressions. In Model 1, as before, only the demographic and familial variables were included in the model. All of the variables, except whether the youths’ mother had committed a crime, were found to be significant. The older the participant was, the more likely that he/she had committed a crime. Females once again were less likely to have engaged in criminal behaviour compared with males. The more educated that the youth was, the less likely that he/she has committed a crime. The opposite was found for income level where a higher income level was associated with having committed an offense before. Youths living in private housing were less likely to have committed a crime compared with their counterparts living in public housing. Finally, if the participant’s father had committed a crime, then it was more likely that the youth would have as well.

| B (SD)                  | Model 1      | Model 2      | Model 3      |
|------------------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|
| Age                    | 0.26 (0.01)**| 0.18 (0.10)  |              |
| Gender                 | -1.00 (0.21)***| -0.88 (0.22)***|              |
| Education level        | -2.38 (0.23)***| -2.04 (0.23)***|              |
| Income                 | 0.43 (0.10)***| 0.38 (0.11)***|              |
| Housing type           | -0.60 (0.22)**| -0.55 (0.23)* |              |
| Father committed a crime| 0.95 (0.39)* | 0.89 (0.41)* |              |
| Mother committed a crime| 0.59 (0.53) | 0.69 (0.55) |              |
| LCP                    |              | 2.69 (0.36)***| 1.64 (0.42)***|
| TLV                    | -1.14 (0.31)**| -0.99 (0.37)**|              |
| ICO                    | 1.88 (0.28)***| 1.20 (0.34)***|              |
| Nagelkerke $R^2$       | 0.42         | 0.24         | 0.46         |

Note: *$p < 0.05$; **$p < 0.01$; ***$p < 0.001$. 

---

W.H. Chui and K.K. Cheng
Consistent with previous findings, when the subscales of the CSS-M were inputted in Model 2, all three subscales were found to be significant. Once again, the higher score on the LCP and ICO was indicative of a higher likelihood to having committed a crime. The TLV factor continued to show a negative association with the outcome variable.

In Model 3, all of the demographic and familial variables, except for age, that were found to be significant in Model 1 remained significant and displayed the same correlation direction. Similarly, the three subscales of the CSS-M continued to be of significance. The LCP and ICO subscales demonstrated a positive association with the TLV subscale showing a negative correlation.

**Discussion and conclusion**

The purpose of this study was to take an established instrument in the CSS-M and determine whether criminal attitudes do correlate with criminal behaviour among Chinese youths in Hong Kong. Besides criminal sentiments, demographic and familial factors were also taken into consideration. The results were somewhat mixed. By and large, criminal attitudes did correlate with criminal behaviour, measured by whether the participant had a criminal conviction, the number of convictions and self-reported commission of crime. All three subscales of the CSS-M were found to be statistically significant. Two of the subscales were easily interpretable and consistent with past studies. It made sense that the more negative attitudes that one has towards the criminal justice agencies of law, courts and police, the more likely that one would be engaged in criminal behaviour. Likewise, the more one identified as a criminal, the more one would participate in illegal acts.

The results of the TLV subscale were, however, unexpected. It was found that the less tolerance that youths had for law violations, the more that they engaged in criminal behaviour. While no definitive explanations can be given at this stage, only a possible reason can be offered. It is possible that youths themselves do not tolerate their own criminal behaviour but still chose to participate in them. Even the most minor offenses or delinquent but non-criminal behaviour, such as staying out late at night or smoking, by youths are frowned upon by Hong Kong’s more conservative society (Vagg, 1998). Youths who are considered ‘deviant’, are expected to show a level of remorse and contrition that as one commentator noted, would be considered “highly exceptional” in Western culture (Vagg, 1998, p. 260). It is possible that youths are also taught to disapprove of law violations. But although youths may disapprove of law violations, they may simply be following an attitude that is socially acceptable and such a stance may not affect their actual criminal conduct. The predictability of the CSS-M is therefore also put in question. There is certainly much room for future studies to continue to test the relationship between criminal attitudes and criminal behaviour in the Chinese context.

Another interesting aspect that emerged from the results is the significance of demographic and familial factors despite the inclusion of criminal attitudes variables. Throughout the regression models, there was a clear impact of participants’ backgrounds on their illegal conduct, such as their level of education and whether their father has committed a crime. Here, we echo Cheung and Cheung’s (2008) observation that Chinese youths are more influenced by their social surroundings because of the collectivistic culture that dominates Chinese societies like Hong Kong. This differs from the individualistic culture found in Western settings. Therefore given the context, it is not surprising to find Chinese youths in our sample to be influenced by social factors with respect to their criminal behaviour. This is not to say that criminal attitudes do not matter because clearly they do, as demonstrated by the series of multiple regressions performed in
this study. What the results do point to is the effect of both criminal attitudes and social factors on adolescents’ criminal activity in the Hong Kong Chinese setting.

However, it should be pointed out that our sample was based on young people recruited from secondary schools. Although these youths reported being involved in criminal activity and some even have more than one criminal conviction, they are most likely to be implicated in relatively minor criminal conduct. Past studies utilising the CSS-M relied on inmate populations who were convicted of more serious offenses. Future studies should measure criminal attitudes of more serious offender populations in the Chinese context.

In sum, this study offers a different dimension to the discussion of the causes of youth delinquency in Hong Kong, namely the role of criminal attitudes. This is an aspect that has received less empirical attention in the past. In future studies of youth crime or delinquency in Hong Kong or in other Chinese societies, we recommend that researchers take attitudes and social factors into account.

Notes on contributors

Wing Hong Chui, PhD, is an associate professor in the Department of Social Work and Social Administration and associate dean in the Faculty of Social Sciences at The University of Hong Kong. His research interest lies in the area of juvenile delinquency and youth justice in Hong Kong.

Kevin Kwok-Yin Cheng, PhD, is an assistant professor in the Faculty of Law at the Chinese University of Hong Kong. His research interest focuses on criminal justice and attitude towards the justice system.

Funding

The work described in this paper was fully supported by a grant offered by the Research Grant Council of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region [Project No. HKU 743511H].

Notes

1. Email: kevincheng@cuhk.edu.hk
2. Since 2003, the age of criminal responsibility has been raised from 7 to 10 in Hong Kong.

References

Adorjan, M., & Chui, W. H. (2014). Responding to youth crime in Hong Kong: Penal elitism, legitimacy and citizenship. London: Routledge.
Agnew, R. (1992). Foundation for a general strain theory of crime and delinquency. *Criminology, 30*, 47–87.
Ajzen, I. (1991). The theory of planned behavior. *Organizational Behavior and Human Decision Processes, 50*, 179–211.
Akzen, I., & Fishbein, M. (1980). Understanding attitude and predicting social behavior. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall.
Andrews, D. A., & Bonta, J. (1994). The psychology of criminal conduct. Cincinnati, OH: Anderson. Census and Statistics Department. (2012). *Hong Kong annual digest of statistics: 2012 edition*. Hong Kong: Hong Kong Government.
Cheung, Y. W. (1997). Family, school, peer, and media predictors of adolescent deviant behavior in Hong Kong. *Journal of Youth and Adolescence, 26*, 569–596.
Cheung, N. W. T., & Cheung, Y. W. (2008). Self-control, social factors, and delinquency: A test of the general theory of crime among adolescents in Hong Kong. *Journal of Youth and Adolescence, 37*, 412–430.
Chui, W. H. (2005). Criminal justice in Hong Kong and the People’s Republic of China: A selected bibliography. Hong Kong: School of Law, City University of Hong Kong.
Chui, W. H., & Chan, H. C. O. (2012a). An empirical investigation of social bonds and juvenile delinquency in Hong Kong. Child & Youth Care Forum, 41, 371–386.
Chui, W. H., & Chan, H. C. O. (2012b). Criminal recidivism among Hong Kong male juvenile probationers. Journal of Child and Family Studies, 21, 857–868.
Chui, W. H., & Chan, H. C. O. (2013). Psychological characteristics of male juvenile offenders in a residential home in Hong Kong. Criminal Behaviour and Mental Health, 23, 41–55.
Gendreau, P., Grant, B. A., Leipciger, M., & Collins, C. (1979). Norms and recidivism rates for the MMPI and selected experimental scales on a Canadian delinquent sample. Canadian Journal of Behavioral Science, 11, 21–31.
Gottfredson, M. R. (2006). The empirical status of control theory in criminology. In F. T. Cullen, J. P. Wright, & K. R. Blevins (Eds.), Taking stock: The status of criminological theory (pp. 77–100). New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction.
Gottfredson, M. R., & Hirschi, T. (1990). A general theory of crime. Palo Alto, CA: Stanford University Press.
Grasmick, H. G., Title, C. R., Bursik, R. J., & Arneklev, B. J. (1993). Testing the core empirical implications of Gottfredson and Hirschi’s general theory of crime. Journal of Research in Crime and Delinquency, 30, 5–29.
Hirschi, T. (1969). Causes of delinquency. Berkeley, CA: University of Chicago Press.
Hong Kong Government (1981). Report of the working group on juvenile crime. Hong Kong: Government Printer.
Jones, C., & Vagg, J. (2007). Criminal justice in Hong Kong. Oxon: Routledge-Cavendish.
Ngai, N., & Cheung, C. (2005). Predictors of the likelihood of delinquency: A study of marginal youth in Hong Kong, China. Youth & Society, 36, 445–470.
Ngai, N., Cheung, C., & Ngai, S. S. (2007). Cognitive and social influences on gang involvement among delinquents in three Chinese cities. Adolescence, 42, 381–403.
Pratt, T. C., & Cullen, F. T. (2000). The empirical status of Gottfredson and Hirschi’s general theory of crime: A meta-analysis. Criminology, 38, 931–964.
Shields, I. W., & Simourd, D. J. (1991). Predicting predatory behavior in a population of incarcerated young offenders. Criminal Justice and Behavior, 18, 180–194.
Simourd, D. J. (1997). The criminal sentiments scale-modified and pride in delinquency scale: Psychometric properties and construct validity of two measures of criminal attitudes. Criminal Justice and Behavior, 24, 52–70.
Simourd, D. J., & Olver, M. E. (2002). The future of criminal attitudes research and practice. Criminal Justice and Behavior, 29, 427–446.
Simourd, D. J., & Van De Ven, J. (1999). Assessment of criminal attitudes: Criterion-related validity of the Criminal Sentiments Scale-Modified and Pride in Delinquency Scale. Criminal Justice and Behavior, 26, 90–106.
Vagg, J. (1998). Delinquency and shame: Data from Hong Kong. British Journal of Criminology, 38, 247–264.
Witte, T. D., Di Placido, C., Gu, D., & Wong, S. C. P. (2006). An investigation of the validity and reliability of the Criminal Sentiments Scale in a sample of treated sex offenders. Sex Abuse: A Journal of Research and Treatment, 18, 249–258.
Wong, D. S. W. (2000). Juvenile crime and responses to delinquency in Hong Kong. International Journal of Offender Therapy and Comparative Criminology, 44, 279–292.
Xu, J. (2011). Hong Kong: The state of criminology. In C. J. Smith, S. X. Zhang, & R. Barberet (Eds.), Routledge handbook of international criminology (pp. 411–418). Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge.