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Do They Pose a Danger: Evaluation of the Recidivism Characteristics in China's Community Corrections?

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ABSTRACT

The modern criminal justice system includes community corrections, which play a preventive role in lowering recidivism among offenders. However, some offenders continue to commit crimes during community corrections. This research focuses on community corrections in Chinese community policing practice, particularly offender recidivism. The study collected a total of 500 questionnaires from offenders in the provincial administrative regions of northern China, which included first offense status, psychological status, and recidivism behavior. The study found that most recidivists are usually arrested for “drunk driving”, which may be related to their ability to exercise self-restraint, and that alcohol may contribute to their deviant behavior. Another important finding relates to young recidivists, who may have difficulty securing employment during community corrections and thus use crime again to gain income. In general, this study explores the offender population in Chinese community corrections practice and discusses the factors within it that influence offender recidivism. This may support law enforcement agencies in further evaluating the effectiveness of community corrections, and may provide new information for understanding community corrections in China.

Keywords: Community corrections; Offender reoffending; Criminal psychology; Chinese policing practices

1. Introduction

In the criminal justice system, community correc-

tions are viewed as a crucial means of reintegrating offenders into society^[1,2]. But not all offenders benefit from community corrections, and some offenders

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re-offend while undergoing community corrections. The causes of offender recidivism are varied ^[3]. For instance, it might be challenging to prevent offenders from recidivism as a result of behavioral mistakes impacted by social and cultural factors ^[4]. In addition, community corrections programmes differ for different types of recidivism. Specifically, community corrections programmes usually involve psychological counselling, voluntary work, and risk evaluation. This is usually done by professionals who develop the community corrections programme and the justice department is responsible for its enforcement.

Importantly, recidivism means that the community correction programme fails, and the offender returns to prison to serve their sentence. Therefore, the effectiveness (prevention of recidivism) of community corrections is the focus of the justice department. However, the judiciary is challenged by the sheer number of offenders in community correction ^[5]. In particular, community corrections frequently require offenders to appear daily before the court. Judiciary officials struggle to cope with such a big number of offenders ^[6], which is the problem. Additionally, during the community corrections process, it can be simple to misrepresent location information for some offenders who are high-risk to supervise ^[7]. The effectiveness of community corrections and public safety may be at potential risk because of this. In judicial practice, recidivism is typically correlated with the psychological status of the offender, and community correctional programs place a special emphasis on psychological offender evaluation ^[8]. In judicial practice, the offender's psychological characteristics are distinctly different and may be influenced by emotions ^[9]. For example, offenders' emotional disorders are caused by financial difficulties or family conflicts and lead to recidivism. The judiciary should concentrate more on the psychological characteristics and emotional changes of offenders. Therefore, community corrections necessitate a thorough comprehension of the offender's psychological condition and the provision of focused corrective measures, which may be a useful way to avoid recidivism and

lessen the stress of community corrections.

In general, it is of policy significance to discuss the recidivism of offenders during community correction, particularly their psychological characteristics. This might be key to further improving the community corrections system even more. Therefore, the psychological characteristics of an offender who recidivates while receiving community sentences in northern China are examined in this study, along with an examination of Reasons for offender recidivism. It also explores the causes of recidivism among offenders receiving community corrections. This study might promote future research on offender recidivism in community corrections and also provide experience for improving community corrections policies.

2. Literature review

For community corrections, the essence is the judicial procedure of the offender's reflection and reintegration into society within the community, and the purpose of community corrections is to prevent recidivism ^[10,11]. Technically, community corrections are still a form of punishment, but they are carried out in the community. Therefore, there are differences in the correctional programmes used by the justice department for different offender types. To a degree, correctional programmes can be classified as strict or lenient, and are adapted to the correctional situation. It is important to note that the use of correctional programmes is not exclusively divided according to the offence committed by the offender, but requires several evaluations by professionals ^[12]. Specifically, the strict correctional programme is usually used for offenders with drug addiction and minor violence, and includes electronic tracking anklets, voluntary work, and the writing of thought reports ^[13,14]. This type of correctional programme tends to be "corrective in behaviour", i.e. the offender's behaviour is regulated so that the offender complies with the law and social rules ^[15]. Lenient programmes, which include family relationship counselling, psychological counselling, and emotional management, place a greater emphasis on the offender's psychological

state than strict programmes do ^[16-18]. For instance, community corrections officers have intervened in the psychological symptoms of kleptomania in a wealthy offender who has committed multiple burglaries through numerous sessions of counselling to stop recidivism. Generally, the kind of community corrections programme is not set in stone and must be customised for each offender.

In judicial practice, the offender's psychological characteristics differ, usually in relation to the crime stage ^[19,20]. Specifically, the psychological state of the offender is a dynamic process, and the psychological characteristics are subject to change, which are divided into the crime preparation, the crime execution and the crime consequences ^[21]. Take violent crime as an example, in the preparation stage the offender's psychological characteristics are dominated by hesitation, restlessness and agitation. This may be a short-term psychological state or a long-term decision-making process. In the execution stage, the offender's psychological characteristics change to impulsiveness and nervousness, even to the point of inducing uncontrolled behaviour that leads to excessive harm. In the crime consequence stage. The psychological characteristics of the offender are dominated by fear and avoidance, but also remorse and guilt may emerge. In general, community corrections need to identify the psychological state of the offender and assess the psychological characteristics of the different stages. The psychological state of the recidivist may be similar, and community corrections programmes are designed to get the offender back into the cycle. Therefore, community corrections need to guide the offender toward the right perception of society and events, and the correct way of dealing with them.

Psychopathology also clearly has an impact on community corrections, and not just in terms of reducing recidivism ^[22]. Some offenders' recidivism might not just be a psychological issue; it might also be a sign of a mental illness ^[23]. For instance, a recidivist may have a mental illness and become "emotional fluctuation" when provoked, which causes them to commit a crime. In such situations, the

judicial officer should seek professional assistance from psychiatric institutions and refrain from stimulating the offender during the community correction process. In order to prevent recidivism in community corrections, more emphasis should be placed on the role of psychopathology, and more psychopathological assessment and treatment should be added to existing correctional measures.

3. Methods

This study was conducted in a provincial administrative region in northern China. As of June 2022, the population of this provincial administrative region is 14 million, of which a total of 7,187 offenders are in community corrections. At the same time, the provincial administrative region is the first place in China to implement a pilot community correction programme. This provides sufficient conditions for observing community corrections for offenders.

The data collection for this study followed the following procedures. Firstly, the researcher applied to the local judiciary and obtained approval for the study. Secondly, the researchers sent out research invitations to offenders in a random sample. Specifically, researchers sent a total of 600 online research invitations, of which 39 offenders did not respond ($N = 39$), 19 offenders declined the research invitation ($N = 19$) and a total of 542 offenders completed the questionnaire ($N = 542$). Thirdly, the researchers collected and checked the questionnaires and obtained a total of 513 valid questionnaires. Fourthly, based on the consideration of data reliability, the researcher verified the content of the questionnaires again by telephone, and a total of 500 questionnaires were obtained. It should be noted that the reason for rechecking the questionnaire was to consider the possibility that community correctional offenders might have masked responses ^[24]. This procedure is to avoid possible misleading data. The questionnaire contains nine sections, which include gender, age, education, income, family relationships, transgressions, types of offences, types of re-offending, and psychological status. In particular, psychological status refers to the offender's mental state, but this

may be dynamic, which includes characteristics, psychological changes and motivation, etc. Specifically, characteristics include mental disorders and asymptomatic; psychological changes include helplessness, anger, loneliness, depression, and guilt; and motivations include financial, hatred, and emotional. In general, these categories are derived from information provided by community corrections staff and discussed by professionals. This study used psychological scales to evaluate the psychiatric status of the offenders. Specifically, the Psychiatric Diagnostic Screening Questionnaire scale was used to test for psychotic symptoms in offenders; the Social Readjustment Rating Scale, the Barratt Impulsiveness Scale and the State-Trait Anger Expression Inventory are used to evaluate psychological change in offenders, i.e. changes in offenders during community corrections; Personal Concerns Inventory (Offender Adaptation) is used to analyse offenders' motivation.

In addition, this study sought the support of third-party professionals in order to avoid the potential influence of subjectivity on the psychological analysis of offenders. Specifically, the third-party professional conducted an independent review of the questionnaire content and conducted a reliability analysis of the psychological sections completed by the offenders. At the same time, this study has conducted an ethical check of the data and managed data security. Specifically, the study was ethically reviewed by the ethics committee of the Tiangong University School of Law and was approved. In terms of data security, the study informed respondents of all information and provided directions for the use of the data. After all analyses were completed, the researchers destroyed all questionnaires and physically destroyed the storage media. During the data analysis, the researchers completed the study on a password-protected university server.

4. Results

In the descriptive analysis of the personal characteristics of the offenders, the majority of community correctional offenders were male (77.8%). In **Figure 1**, the age range distribution of offenders is present-

ed, with the majority of offenders in the age range of 31-43 years (52%).

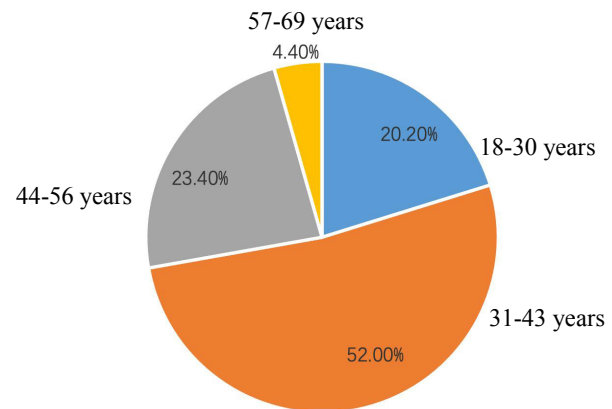


Figure 1. Age range distribution of offenders.

In addition, this study examined offenders' educational level, income, employment, and family relationships. Specifically, the majority of community corrections offenders had junior high school education (40.5%), with a small percentage of offenders having high school education or higher (11.99%). In terms of income, the majority of offenders had a monthly household income of RMB 5,000 or more (42.71%), while a minority of offenders had a monthly household income of less than RMB 1,000 (6.48%). It should be noted that some of the offenders did not have a legitimate income and most of their income came from crime. The monthly household income only represents the financial status of the offender's household and is not fully representative of the offender's own income status.

Importantly, the employment of offenders shows a great difference (**Figure 2**). The majority of offenders were unemployed (28.19%), i.e., not regaining income. Some offenders are self-employed (9.33%), for example by opening shops and street vending. A very small proportion of offenders were employed in skilled jobs (3.65%). One possible explanation is that the offenders received skills training in prison to obtain work. Among the offenders' family relationships, the majority of offenders considered their family relationships harmonious (90.39%). It should be noted that this represents only the self-perception of the offenders. Offenders may have prejudiced perceptions of family relationships that differ from the

usual social perceptions ^[25].

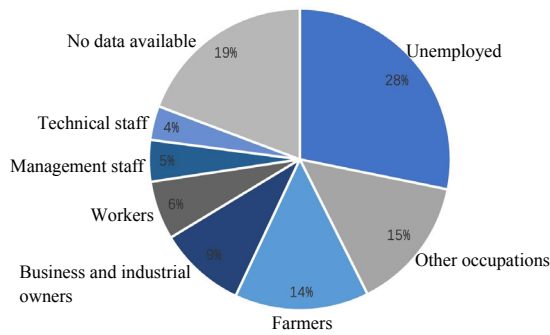


Figure 2. Occupational distribution of offenders.

In Table 1 data on the types of crime committed by offenders are presented. Specifically, the types of crime can be broadly classified into three categories, which are financial crimes, violent crimes, and traffic crimes. Within this category, financial crimes accounted for the majority (36.4%), followed by violent crimes (23.8%), and traffic crimes accounted for the least (9.2%). This may be related to the judicial function of community corrections ^[26], which are usually aimed at offenders who do not pose a significant social threat, and to help them reintegrate into society. In judicial practice, financial offenders may be considered by the courts to be less socially dangerous.

Table 1. Crime type of the offender.

Crime types	Number of offenders	Percentage (%)
Violent assault	87	17.4%
Financial crimes	70	14%
Taxation crimes	52	10.4%
Traffic crimes	46	9.2%
Fraud crimes	36	7.2%
Group violence crimes	32	6.4%
Burglary crimes	24	4.8%
Drunken driving crimes	23	4.6%
Others	120	24%

Another important finding of this study is the psychological state of offenders during community corrections. Specifically, the majority of offenders were characterised as asymptomatic, i.e. not displaying significant mental impairment. In terms of psycho-

logical change, this did not show significant abnormalities, with a small number of offenders tending towards guilt, but other offenders were not willing to provide this information. In terms of offender motivation, the majority of offenders' motivation to recidivism was financially related, which validates the results of the previous offenders' occupations, i.e. that most offenders probably lacked job opportunities.

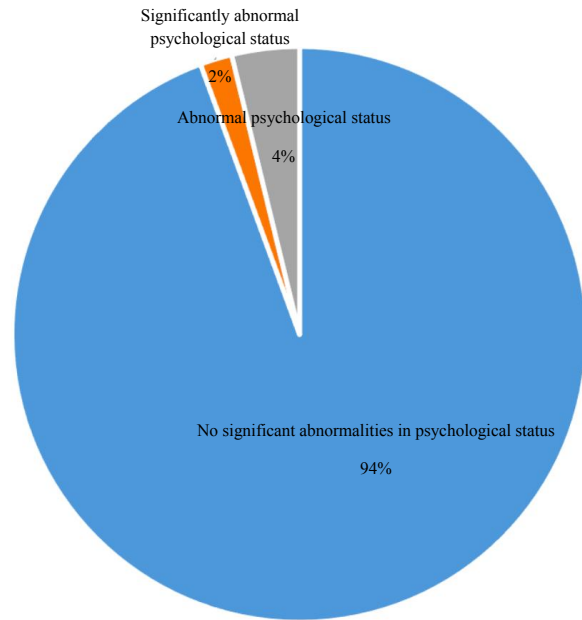


Figure 3. Descriptive analysis of the offender's psychological status.

5. Discussion

This study explores this offender recidivism during community corrections and focuses on the psychological state of offenders. It is worth discussing that the recidivism of offenders does not imply the effectiveness of the community corrections procedure, which may be the result of multiple factors in the environment in which the offender is placed. For example, the offender decides to get paid through labour after undergoing community corrections, but society does not provide work opportunities. In the long run, the offender may fall into financial hardship and thus re-offend. This supports the findings of this study regarding the motivation and employment status of recidivists. In short, the environment in

which community corrections offenders find themselves is critical, and this may directly affect the offender's recidivism.

In addition, another interesting finding of this study is the distribution of offenders' employment, with a higher proportion of unemployed people. This can be explained by the rational choice theory, where offenders are unable to earn income through legal means, and survival forces them to earn income through illegal channels ^[27]. This means that while crime's costs are falling, the benefits of crime are gradually increasing. This might be a significant factor in why offenders' recidivism. From the perspective of recidivism prevention, community corrections should provide skills training and career opportunities for offenders. This may be an effective way to reduce recidivism among offenders. When offenders are given employment, they can build social relationships and obtain income through legal channels. This has also been demonstrated in some community corrections projects ^[28,1].

The study's final finding relates to the evaluation of the offender's psychological state, which is not notably aberrant for the majority of offenders. It is important to point out that there may be differences in the psychological states of community correctional offenders and prison offenders. In terms of self-perception, there may be confusion among community correctional offenders about the change in identity. In contrast, offenders in prison typically undergo a mandatory adjustment period of about three months to help them reflect on themselves ^[29]. However, the lack of this process for community correctional offenders may be a major factor in the difference in psychological status. This point may be relevant to the treatment of community corrections. Professionals are employed by the judiciary to provide psychological treatment to the offenders during the community correctional process, such as talking and sand trays ^[30,31]. By improving the offender's psychological state, this treatment may reduce recidivism and social risk to the offender. However, there are potential risks associated with psychotherapy and psychological evaluation in community corrections.

On the one hand, this requires a professional, impartial evaluation of the offender, and the evaluation reports should regularly undergo independent review by a third party. On the other hand, some offenders can be unwilling to receive therapy, which might create conflict. The judiciary should exercise caution and supervise psychological treatment as a result.

6. Conclusions

In this study, the situation of community corrections in China is explored, and analysed the factors that influence offender recidivism are. As with other studies, this study still has some limitations. Particularly, the study's data sources were limited by the possibility that more intuitive information, might be obtained through direct contact with offenders, such as interviews. Due to the limitations of the COVID-19 pandemic and judicial policy, the researchers were unable to interview offenders. The study is still useful, because questionnaires can provide information on the factors that influence offender recidivism. This has significant ramifications for strengthening community corrections and establishing recidivism prevention policies.

In-depth research on community corrections in China is presented in this research, along with a critique of community correction. The study further analyses the role of community corrections in judicial practice and the evaluation of offender groups. The study's conclusions reinforce the need for more research into community corrections. Judges and policy makers can benefit from this research to better support the reintegration of offenders into society.

The self-perceptions of offenders deserve further exploration in future research. One expectation of community corrections is to help offenders to be able to review their criminal history so that they can reflect and repent. Therefore, the self-perception of community corrections offenders is crucial, and this is a direction for further research in the future.

Author Contributions

H.X wrote the manuscript and discussed the data.

X.L was responsible for the design of the whole research and supervised the writing of the manuscript.

Conflict of Interest

There is no conflict of interests to disclose for this research.

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