

# **53RD ISSUE**

## **OPERATIONS SPOTLIGHT**

**MITIGATING VIOLENCE IN PRISONS TO  
ENSURE SAFE AND SECURE CUSTODY FOR  
EFFECTIVE REHABILITATION**



**SINGAPORE  
PRISON SERVICE**

# **APCCA Newsletter**

**A multi-pronged  
approach to mitigate  
violence in prisons**



Singapore Prison Service's (SPS) mission is to enforce the safe and secure custody of inmates and rehabilitate them, for a safer Singapore. Assault rates remain low at a rate of 41.4 per 10,000 inmates for FY2023 (To ensure a safe environment for both staff and inmates, SPS has developed a multi-pronged approach to deter and mitigate violence which includes (i) prevention, (ii) deterrence, (iii) detection & response, (iv) post-incident management and (v) population-specific measures. This comprehensive approach has enabled SPS to achieve a low assault rate at 41.4 assaults per 10,000 inmates in FY 2023 (up to Dec 2023).

**(i) Prevention**

SPS places a strong emphasis on proactive measures to mitigate violence in prisons. One of the key approaches employed by SPS is the implementation of **Restorative Practices**.



*Prison officers and Correctional Rehabilitation Specialists conduct restorative circles i.e. discussions, for inmates to discuss prosocial topics and encourage positive behavioural change.*

SPS officers engage in regular interactions with inmates to reinforce the principles of Restorative Practices. These interactions provide opportunities for officers to build rapport with inmates, address underlying issues, and encourage positive behavioural change. Through open dialogue and constructive feedback, inmates are encouraged to take ownership of their actions and work towards resolving conflicts in a non-violent manner.

By fostering a culture of respect and understanding, SPS aims to reduce instances of aggression and promote positive interactions among inmates.

In addition to Restorative Practices, SPS implements engages the inmates with educational programmes, vocational training, and recreational activities. These initiatives provide inmates with opportunities for personal growth, skill development, and social integration which keeps them motivated in remaining offence-free.

(ii) **Deterrence**

In addition to prevention, SPS employs a range of deterrence measures to deter inmates from engaging in violent behaviour in prisons.

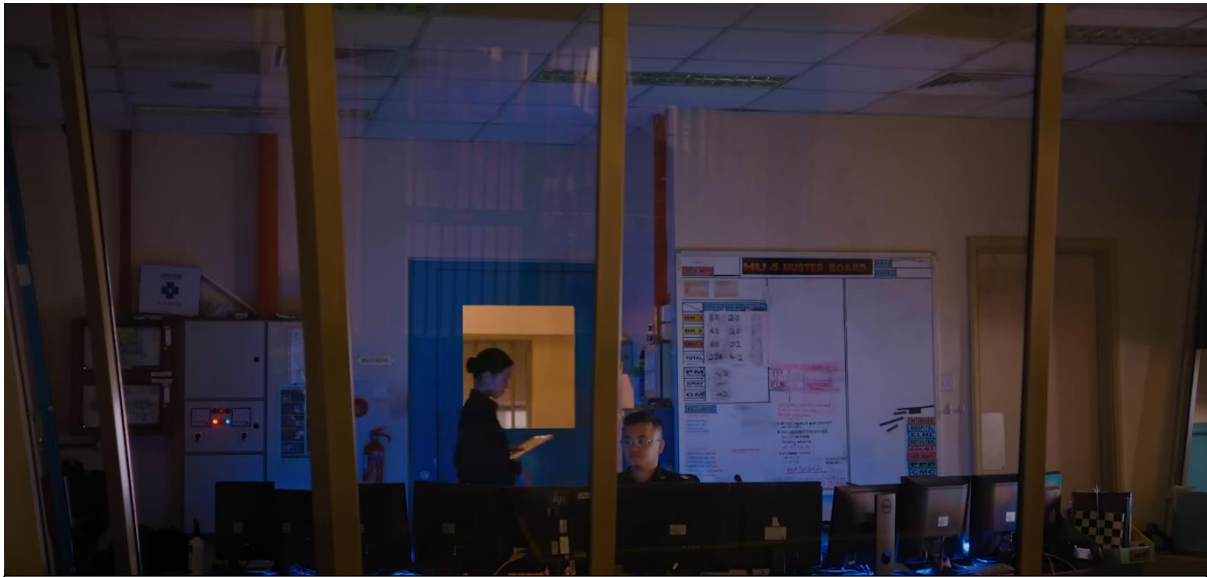
One of the primary deterrence measures employed by SPS is the establishment of clear and **transparent disciplinary frameworks**. Newly admitted inmates are briefed on the consequences for violent actions and the expectations for orderly behaviour within the facility. By setting clear expectations and enforcing consequences consistently, SPS aims to deter inmates from engaging in disruptive or aggressive behaviour.

Additionally, the presence of **surveillance systems and security measures** serves as a **visible** deterrent to potential perpetrators. Inmates are aware that their actions are being monitored, and the risk of detection deters them from engaging in violence.



*Surveillance cameras serve as a visible deterrent as inmates are aware that their actions are being monitored.*

SPS also conducts regular inspections and searches to deter and detect the possession of contraband and illicit substances, which can fuel conflict and violence within the prison population. By maintaining a strong deterrent stance against prohibited items, SPS minimises the opportunities for violence to occur and reinforces the message that such behaviour will not be tolerated.

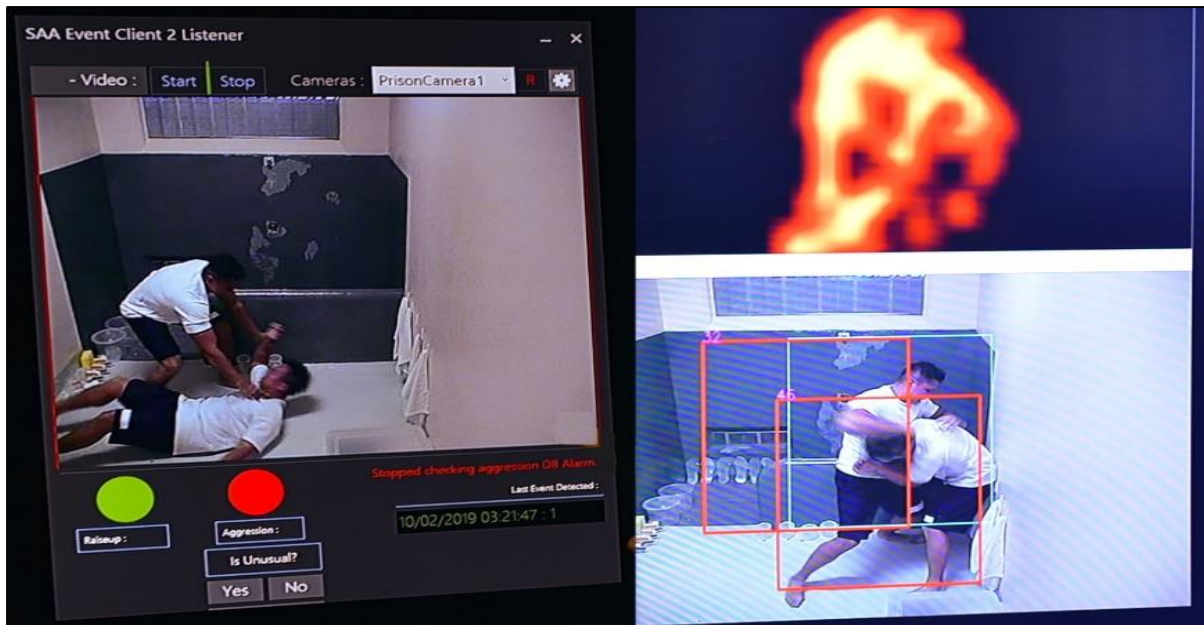


*The Unit Control Centre, where prison officers watch over the correctional unit through visual observation and surveillance cameras, and alert staff in the event of any emergency.*

### **(iii) Detection & Response**

Despite preventive and deterrent measures, incidents of violence may still occur within correctional facilities. In such cases, it is essential to have swift detection and response. SPS leverages technology and staff training to enhance its capabilities in this area.

One of the technological innovations utilised is the Advanced Video Analytics to Detect Aggression (AVATAR) system. This system analyses video footage from surveillance cameras to detect aggression or violence, and acts of self-harm. When potential threats are detected, the system alerts prison officers, enabling them to intervene swiftly and prevent the escalation of conflict.



*(Picture above is an enactment of a fight in a prison cell) The Advanced Video Analytics to Detect Aggression (AVATAR) system triggers an alert when it detects aggression, enabling prison officers to respond and intervene faster to protect and save lives.*

In addition to technological solutions, SPS places a strong emphasis on staff training in recognising and responding to behavioural indicators of violence. Officers undergo regular training sessions to familiarise themselves with common triggers and warning signs, equipping them with the knowledge and skills to intervene effectively when necessary.

#### **(iv) Post-incident management**

Following the detection of violence incidents, it is necessary to manage and return the unit and inmates to normalcy, and to review the incidents to prevent future reoccurrence where possible.

These protocols include conducting after-action reviews to assess the circumstances surrounding the incident, identify contributing factors, and determine areas for improvement. By learning from past incidents, SPS can refine its strategies and procedures to better prevent and respond to similar situations in the future.

SPS also provides mental health support to staff members involved in or affected by incidents at work. Psychologists offer counselling and debriefing sessions to help staff cope with the emotional impact of such events and maintain their mental well-being and resilience. By prioritising staff wellbeing and morale, SPS ensures that its personnel are equipped to handle challenging situations and continue to perform their duties effectively.



*After-action reviews are conducted, and coaching can help prison officers identify areas of improvement.*

**(v) Population-specific measures**

SPS recognises that different inmate populations may have varying needs and risk profiles, requiring tailored interventions to address their specific challenges effectively. Hence, SPS has implemented population-specific strategies to address the unique needs of different inmate groups.

For example, youth offenders may be more susceptible to negative peer influence and impulsive behaviour. In response, SPS has developed specialised programs and interventions



*Young prisoners preparing a self-cooked meal under the "I Can Achieve" initiative.*

aimed at addressing the underlying factors contributing to youth violence. One of these programs is called the "I Can Achieve" Initiative which is an incentive-based programme to encourage good behaviour among Reformative Training Centre inmates (who are under the age of 21). Inmates may get benefits such as extra letterforms or being allowed to consume a self-cooked meal, such as Maggi instant noodles and sausages, if they maintain sustained good behaviour. By tailoring interventions to the

specific needs of different inmate populations, SPS maximises its effectiveness in preventing and addressing violent behaviour within its facilities.

## **Conclusion**

The Singapore Prison Service's anti-violence strategies encompass a multi-faceted approach that addresses prevention, deterrence, detection & response, post-incident management as well as population-specific measures. By prioritising safety and security within its correctional facilities, SPS continues to mitigate violence in prisons to ensure safe and secure custody for effective rehabilitation.

**Development of Prison-based  
Rehabilitation Dog Services in Hong Kong**



**Correctional Services Department  
Hong Kong Special Administrative Region  
People's Republic of China**

# **Development of Prison-based Rehabilitation Dog Services in Hong Kong**

## **A. Introduction**

The Correctional Services Department of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region (HKCSD) has a team of clinical psychologists who have been successful in developing and implementing evidence-based treatment programmes for various penal populations, including violent offenders, sex offenders, substance abusers and female offenders, with a view to changing the offending behaviours of persons in custody (PICs) and improving their mental health (HKCSD, 2024). The latest initiative involves incorporating animal-assisted intervention into the Department's rehabilitation work. Recent meta-analyses have demonstrated the effectiveness of prison-based animal programmes in improving offenders' mental health (e.g., Duindam et al., 2020; Villafaina-Dominguez et al., 2020). A potential underlying mechanism therein is the human-animal interaction that elicits physiological changes in humans, leading to improved mood and reduced stress levels (e.g. Cole et al., 2007). Based on this evidence, the HKCSD has introduced dog-based Animal-Assisted Activities (AAA) and Animal-Assisted Therapy (AAT) to enhance the well-being of PICs, with the assistance of trained dog handlers and clinical psychologists.

Under the umbrella term of Animal-Assisted Intervention (AAI), AAA is defined as programmes involving animals in activities aimed at supporting and enhancing participants' overall well-being, while AAT encompasses treatment-oriented plans that integrate animals into the therapy to facilitate improvements in participants' physical, cognitive, psychosocial, behavioural and emotional functioning (AAII, n.d.).

## **B. Development of Dog-based Animal-assisted Services (Phase One) in HKCSD**

To develop dog-based animal-assisted services, we have embarked on a comprehensive process including conducting an extensive literature review, consulting experts, and arranging staff training on animal-assisted intervention. In August 2023, we initiated a trial run of the first round of dog-based AAT groups. Our clinical psychologists, in collaboration with a non-governmental organisation

(NGO) specialising in companion dog training, worked alongside dog handlers with their trained dogs to facilitate the running of these groups.

We have conducted three rounds of AAT groups in Lo Wu Correctional Institution (LWCI), an institution for adult women. Each AAT group comprised 12 sessions. During these sessions, female PICs were educated on behavioural principles such as positive/negative reinforcement, punishment, classical and operant conditioning, animal welfare, animal behaviour, and essential dog training skills. Participants were given the opportunity to practise their dog training skills by teaching the dogs new tricks. Simultaneously, clinical psychologists led group discussions to promote self-reflection, personal growth and positive values, enhance self-awareness, and improve institutional adjustment.

A total of 17 female PICs showing initial symptoms of depression, anxiety and/or stress as indicated on the 21-item Depression Anxiety Stress Scale (DASS-21) (Taouk et al., 2001) participated in the AAT groups. Statistics from the post-intervention assessments revealed that there were significant reductions in depression, anxiety and stress levels among these participants.



Figure 1: A dog-based animal-assisted treatment group in LWCI.

### **C. Development of Dog-based Animal-assisted Services (Phase Two) in HKCSD**

Building on the success of the trial groups, the HKCSD established the “Rehabilitation Dog Services” Unit in January 2024. Two Labrador Retrievers were carefully selected and adopted from a NGO to provide rehabilitation services for PICs. Three dog handlers have been recruited who have been arranged to undergo intensive training in delivering AAA in correctional institutions.

Since February 2024, the dog handlers have been conducting AAA in LWCI under the guidance of clinical psychologists. These activities provide interested PICs with valuable opportunities to engage and interact with rehabilitation dogs, thereby improving their emotional and mental well-being and creating a positive and supportive institutional environment.

During the three-month trial period, 181 female PICs in LWCI participated in AAA during their exercise time. Pre- and post-responses on DASS-21 showed that their levels of depression, anxiety and stress significantly decreased after participating in AAA. Interestingly, the observation of human-animal interaction also generated positive impact on the mental health status of the observers. Seventy-five PICs who observed the running of AAA were administered the DASS-21. Pre- and post-results indicated a significant reduction in their level of anxiety. However, the magnitude of change was not as great as that of the AAA participants. Comparatively, a group of 51 PICs in LWCI who did not partake in AAA showed no significant change in their mental health status over the same period. These results strongly support the efficacy of AAA in improving the mental health of PICs in the HKCSD.

In addition to the aforementioned activities, the dog handlers have been implementing another AAA programme known as the “Rehabilitation Dog Care and Training Internship Programme” since April 2024 at Phoenix House, a halfway house designed to facilitate the reintegration of young male supervisees into society after their discharge from the detention centre, training centres and drug addiction treatment centres. Under the guidance of clinical psychologists, PICs have benefited substantially from the invaluable hands-on experience in dog grooming, caring and training.



Figure 2 : Rehabilitation Dog Care and Training Internship Programme implemented at Phoenix House.

#### **D. The Way Forward**

Looking ahead, the HKCSD's clinical psychologists will dedicate their efforts to developing a comprehensive plan to further enhance the Department's rehabilitative efforts through the implementation of AAI. In view of the prevalence of mental health concerns among PICs, such as substance abuse, complex trauma and other psychological issues, the Department aims to utilise the therapeutic benefits of animal-assisted interventions to address these specific challenges. By integrating AAI into its treatment programmes, we can provide PICs with specialised support and interventions tailored to meet their individual needs.

Moreover, we will step up our efforts in conducting extensive research to study the effectiveness and efficacy of both AAT and AAA within correctional settings. The research will involve systematic evaluations of outcomes related to mental health, behaviour and overall well-being of PICs. By generating empirical evidence, we can further validate the positive impact of animal-assisted interventions and refine our existing practices to achieve optimal results.

Through the provision of animal-assisted treatment and ongoing research

endeavours, significant advancements in offender rehabilitation are anticipated. Our ultimate goal is to stimulate positive improvements in the mental well-being and overall rehabilitation of PICs, thereby facilitating their successful reintegration into society. By adopting this comprehensive approach, we strive to create a positive and supportive environment that strengthens PICs' determination and abilities to overcome their challenges and embark on a new path towards positive change.

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