



**SCHOOL OF LAW AND SOCIAL JUSTICE**

**INTERNATIONAL CRIMINOLOGICAL RESEARCH UNIT (ICRU):  
RESEARCH SEMINAR**

**WEDNESDAY 25<sup>th</sup> MAY 2016: 4pm – 5.30pm (VENUE TBC)**

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*Perceptions of Fairness and Satisfaction in Lawyer-Client Interactions Among  
Young Offenders in Hong Kong*

In its principles on conduct of the legal profession, the International Bar Association (IBA) states that as a fundamental principle “a lawyer shall at all times maintain the highest standards of honesty, integrity and *fairness* [emphasis added] toward the lawyer’s clients, the court, colleagues and all those with whom the lawyer comes into professional contact” (IBA, 2011, p.5). This study used a mixed-methods approach to examine the perceptions of fairness and satisfaction young offenders have towards their lawyers in the Hong Kong criminal justice system, drawing on procedural justice theory. The main idea behind procedural justice theory is that the process by which people are treated is more important than the outcome that they receive. In turn, satisfaction with the process often leads to perceptions that the justice system is legitimate and legitimacy leads to deference to authorities and adherence to their decisions.

To add to the limited literature and to extend the study of procedural justice to lawyer-client interactions, a sample of 168 young offenders aged between 14 to 21 years old was surveyed in Hong Kong. Regression analyses indicated that participants who had private lawyers were more satisfied compared to those who had duty lawyers. Two elements of procedural justice, participation and trustworthiness, demonstrated the strongest influence on youths’ satisfaction with their lawyers. Supplementary interviews with 30 young defendants further explained the discrepancy, revealing that the limited amount of time spent by duty lawyers in meetings and their detached focus contributed to clients’ low perceptions of participation and trustworthiness. By uncovering areas where participants felt that they were treated in a procedurally unfair way, and *why* they felt this way, we can identify areas of improvement in the lawyer-client relationship, especially between lawyers and youth clients.

Eric Chui is Professor in the Department of Applied Social Sciences, City University of Hong Kong and COFUND Senior Research Fellow, University of Durham (May – July 2016).