



OJJDP-FUNDED RESEARCH IN BRIEF

Effectiveness of Restorative Justice Programs

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Evidence suggests that some restorative justice programs—when compared to traditional approaches—can reduce future delinquent behavior and produce greater satisfaction for victims.

Research Overview

Restorative justice programs seek to repair relations and end discord between youthful offenders and their victims. These types of programs view crime as a violation of people and relationships. They emphasize offender accountability for wrongdoing, respect for participants, and keeping the victim central throughout the process as a way to repair the relationship between the offender and victim and reduce future delinquent behavior.

The objective of this research was first to synthesize high quality, quantitative studies that evaluate the effectiveness of various restorative justice programs, and second, to evaluate the effect of different restorative justice program components, such as apologizing to victims, family participation, and including the victim in the process, to name a few. From these studies, researchers extracted results related to delinquency, nondelinquency, and victim outcomes for offender and victim participants in restorative justice programs.

Research Findings

Systematic analysis of studies of restorative justice programs and practices showed a moderate reduction in future delinquent behavior relative to more traditional juvenile court processing. However, those studies with stronger research designs (i.e., random assignment studies) showed smaller results, raising concerns about the robustness of these overall findings. Victim participants in these programs, however, do appear to experience a number of benefits and are more satisfied with these programs than traditional approaches to juvenile justice.

When researchers examined the different program types, they found promising results in terms of delinquency

outcomes for the offenders for victim-offender conferencing, family group conferencing, arbitration/mediation programs, and circle sentencing programs. However, in the more rigorous studies, the strength of these findings diminished, and findings across studies were highly variable. None of the program elements analyzed had a more additive effect than other program elements with the exception of including a preconference or a premediation meeting.

Research Design

The study involved a [meta-analysis](#) of randomized and quasi-experimental studies retrieved from a systematic search of 41 electronic databases and 50 state websites. The systematic search for high quality quantitative research identified 84 evaluations nested within 60 unique research studies. Researchers extracted data from each study, including information related to general study characteristics, features of each treatment and comparison condition, characteristics of the participant sample, methodology, outcome measures, and results. The researchers used inverse variance weighted random effects meta-analysis methods to analyze the effect sizes.

Policy/Practice Implications

The findings suggest certain restorative justice programs could reduce future youth delinquency and increase victim satisfaction with the outcome. However, it is unclear how much confidence can be placed on these results; additional rigorous evaluations are needed to substantiate the promising effects identified.

Resources

OJJDP.gov: <https://www.ojjdp.gov/research/Restorative-Justice-Principles-Juvenile-Justice.html>

Source: Wilson, D.B., Olaghere, A., & Kimbrell, C.S. (2017). *Effectiveness of restorative justice principles in juvenile justice: A meta-analysis*. <https://www.ncjrs.gov/pdffiles1/ojjdp/grants/250872.pdf>

