

Measuring Juvenile Justice Outcomes for Restorative Justice Diversion Programs

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The use of restorative justice principles for diversion of juvenile offenders seems to be a promising alternative to the more punitive practices of the traditional juvenile justice system. Restorative justice seeks to restore the harm caused to victims and the community through direct engagement with the affected parties while maintaining a focus on offender accountability. Although there have been many individual studies of restorative justice programs of all types, there has been less focus on consistency across studies. Through a review of 11 existing studies covering 15 juvenile restorative justice diversion programs, sourced from a recent meta-analysis (3), I analyze the variety in both program attributes and restorative justice research. Findings indicate that juvenile restorative justice diversion programs differ greatly in attributes such as funding, administration, and sources of cases. In addition, examination of the effectiveness of restorative justice diversion programs has found mixed results. While it is difficult to draw definitive conclusions from this research given the wide variety in how recidivism and other program outcomes are measured, a majority of the studies included in the analysis supported the continued use of restorative justice programs as a diversion method for juveniles.

I. INTRODUCTION

There were over 400,000 juveniles arrested and 25,000 juveniles in residential placement facilities across the United States in 2020 (1). However, we know most juveniles that engage in criminal activity do not become career criminals, raising the question of how to best handle the juvenile offenders who will age into law-abiding citizens (2). In recent years, there has been increased interest in moving away from the punitive practices of the traditional juvenile justice system. One potential alternative is restorative justice, which focuses on teaching the juvenile personal responsibility and integrating victims and the community into the response to the crime. More specifically, using restorative justice as a diversionary method to keep juveniles out of the court system altogether has potential for economic and social benefits (3).

Diversion from traditional court processing can occur at various stages and take various forms but seeks to keep the offender out of a correctional facility. Diversion may be at the discretion of law enforcement or the District Attorney's office, and may include warning programs, teen courts, treatment services, restorative justice, and more (4). Despite the variety in how these programs may be executed, Farrell and Hammond compiled a list of some of the "best practices" for youth diversion programs (4, p. 12). These practices include the use of standardized screening practices, the development of a network of community-based service providers (academic, substance abuse, family programs), and the prevention of future prosecution

coupled with expungement of arrest records for juveniles that successfully complete the diversion program (4). While these recommendations are for youth diversion programs, a diversion program that follows restorative justice principles would meet these standards.

Restorative justice takes a comprehensive approach to justice, focusing on addressing the needs of the offender, victim, and larger community when a transgression occurs. Howard Zehr defines the three "pillars" of restorative justice as "harms and needs, obligations, and engagement" (5, p. 20). When a crime has been committed, there is a level of harm done to the victim and the community that must be addressed; this leads to obligations for the offender, including opportunities for participation in activities that teach accountability and responsibility (5). Therefore, an effective restorative justice program would focus on restoring relationships, engaging victims to determine their needs, and offering thoughtful and practical ways for offenders to provide restitution and learn from their mistakes without being shunned from society.

The idea that restorative justice programs are a better alternative to the traditional criminal justice system is supported by most criminological theories. In his case for restorative justice, Braithwaite evaluates how these programs – when implemented according to the guiding principles – align with our understanding of an effective response to crime (6). Reintegrative shaming theory suggests that an effective response to crime involves high disapproval coupled with high reintegration (6). Restorative justice successfully combines these two goals by holding the offender

personally accountable while also maintaining them as a valued member of the community. In addition, rehabilitation theory suggests that an effective response to crime focuses on changing the offender, arguing that this is most successfully accomplished by families (6). Along these lines, juvenile restorative justice programs often include parent participation and frequently allow juvenile offenders to stay at home instead of being sent to a closed facility. In addition, while restorative justice is more focused on the act and less on the person, it can still help build motivation and improve follow-through for offenders through the emphasis on accountability (6). Finally, it is also specifically important that restorative justice programs come as a diversionary measure to ensure that juveniles avoid the trauma and stigma of a traditional court proceeding and traditional dispositions of probation or incarceration.

The restorative justice youth diversion programs analyzed in this article range in their adherence to these ideal practices and not all sources analyzed provided enough information to draw definitive conclusions about the quality of the programs. Putting any theory into practice is a difficult endeavor (17), and thus it is important that individuals working in restorative justice diversion programs ensure adherence to the evidence-based practices and mission of juvenile diversion and restorative justice.

This paper literature reviews 11 articles that compare juveniles, ranging from 8 to 18 years old, who participated in restorative justice diversion programs to a control group of juveniles. All articles seek to determine whether each restorative justice program reduced recidivism, measured as the probability of re-offense, rearrest, or return to prison (7). This paper aims to analyze the programs studied and the results generated from each article to identify trends in restorative justice diversion programs and in the evaluation of such programs. Ultimately, this analysis revealed far more differences than similarities among the restorative justice programs in terms of program attributes, program evaluations, and program success. Nevertheless, the articles analyzed had an overwhelmingly positive view of restorative justice diversion programs for juveniles and recommended that these programs continue to be implemented and expanded.

II. METHODS

This paper is a review and analysis of eleven articles, ten of which were sourced from a meta-analysis on restorative justice for juveniles by Wilson, Olaghere, and Kimbrell (3). Their meta-analysis is the most recent and in-depth resource available on the use of restorative justice for juveniles with 60 studies and 84 evaluations

used in the analysis (3). The original codebook for the meta-analysis was accessed via ICPSR. I selected all the cases that fit the criteria for the focus of my study: The program must have a restorative justice component, be a form of pretrial diversion, and deal with “delinquents” (that is, the juvenile committed an illegal offense, not merely a violation of school rules). This filter revealed ten cases, three of which were academic articles, five of which were reports, and two of which were master’s theses. One additional article was included (15), since it was a supplemental report to the article written by Griffith (14), that reported on another measurement used to assess the same program.

Each article was analyzed on two fronts: program attributes and research results. Program attributes including funding, administration, and cases involved were compared for the restorative justice diversion programs at the center of each study. The goal of this analysis was to provide context to the research results and highlight the difficulties in generalizing the results of each study. Second, the specific research results and recommendations by the authors from each article or report were analyzed, with the goal of commenting on the wide variety of outcomes used to measure success of the program. All studies measured recidivism – albeit in diverse ways – and some studies included other measures of success that reflect on the basic principles of restorative justice and diversion, such as participant satisfaction or community service hours completed.

III. RESULTS

A. Programs

Each restorative justice diversion program was unique, with notable differences in funding, administration, source of cases, type of restorative justice, and type of crimes included among the programs. Table 1 below summarizes the information presented in this section, with information regarding the specific programs that each article included in the study analyzed.

B. Funding, Administration & Source of Cases

Funding for juvenile justice is always limited, and this is particularly the case for alternatives to probation or incarceration. Four of the ten articles assessed programs that were funded via grants (usually federal or state governments) (8, 14, 17, 18), while another four of the ten were given consistent government funding (8, 9, 10, 13). This is not representative of all restorative justice programs nationwide, since four of the ten articles were government-sponsored reports on the effectiveness of

Table 1: Programs Summarized

	Location	Funding	Administration	Source of Cases	Type of RJ Program	Types of Crimes Included
Evje & Cushman (2000)¹ (8)	Six counties in California	Grant & Government	Non-Profit & Independent	Police/Probation, DA	VOC	Serious Person & Property, Minor Person & Property
Bergseth & Bouffard (2007) (9)	Clay County, Minnesota	Government	Independent	Police/Probation, DA, School	VOC, Community Panel	Minor Person & Property
Cunningham (2007) (10)	Northern Territory, Australia	Government	Criminal Justice System	Police/Probation	VOC, Family Conferencing	Serious Property, Minor Person & Property
Forgays & DeMilio (2005) (11)	Whatcom County, Washington	Info. Unavailable	Non-Profit	DA	Teen Court	Minor Person & Property, Drug/Alcohol
Jacobsen (2013) (12)	Clallam County, Washington	Info. Unavailable	Info. Unavailable	Prosecutor	Teen Court	Minor Person & Property, Drug/Alcohol
Niemeyer & Shichor (1996) (13)	Orange County, California	Government	Info. Unavailable	Police/Probation	VOC	Serious Person & Property, Minor Person & Property
Griffith (1983) (14)	Ada County, Idaho	Grant	Info. Unavailable	Court Hearings (Random Assignment Design)	Restitution	Serious Person & Property, Minor Person & Property
Stone (2000) (16)	Multnomah County, Oregon	Info. Unavailable	Non-Profit	Info. Unavailable	VOC	Minor Person & Property
Turner et al. (2002) (17)	Ventura County, California	Grant	Non-Profit & Criminal Justice System	Police/Probation	“Probation with Benefits”	Citations
Wilson (1982) (18)	Ventura County, California	Grant	Criminal Justice System	Police/Probation	Restitution	Info. Unavailable

¹ Provided summarized analysis of six different Victim Offender Reconciliation Programs in California

Table 1. Programs Summarized

the programs to determine if they should continue to be funded. Nevertheless, funding is a critical issue for all programs as it dictates the number of staff and other resources, which then impacts the number of juveniles that can be served and how much support can be offered to each juvenile.

In addition, there was variety in program administration, which dictates how many individuals a program can reach and how much control the program staff has over eligibility for the program. Three articles included programs that were in some way an extension of the juvenile justice system, often through probation departments (10, 17, 18), three had programs run by non-profits (8, 16, 17), and two had programs run by other independent organizations that had agreements with the local juvenile justice system (8, 9).

Finally, the sources of the involved cases have an impact on how the program operates. Six of the ten

articles assessed programs where cases were referred to the program by the police and/or probation departments (8-10, 13, 17, 18). This is a critical component of diversion since it prevents juvenile offenders from ever entering the court system. One article did not provide this information (16), and each of the programs in the remaining three articles sourced their cases differently: One solely from the District Attorney (11), one from prosecutors (12), and one from court hearings as part of the random assignment experimental design of the study (14). All programs had some sort of screening criteria that law enforcement and probation officers used to determine whether the juvenile was eligible for the program. However, programs offered varying degrees of discretion for officers. In the Australian victim-offender and family conferencing programs, police officers were able to determine eligibility based on the severity of the crime and the perceived risk of the offender (10). In the Whatcom County teen court rj program, only second-time

offenders were eligible (11).

C. Type of Restorative Justice Program

The programs included in this analysis would succeed to varying degrees in meeting the ideal standards of restorative justice and diversion programs. Five of the ten articles reviewed Victim Offender Conference (VOC) style programs (8-10, 13, 16). These programs, at least in theory, most align with the principles of restorative justice by bringing together offenders and victims to discuss the crime and find a course of action to repair the harm caused. In addition, two articles analyzed teen court programs (11, 12) and two articles reviewed restitution programs (14, 18). Teen courts recreate a courtroom setting where teenagers occupy most of the courtroom roles and judge and sentence their peers (3). Restitution programs focus primarily on the offender repaying the victim, either through monetary compensation, community service, or “other personal services” (3, p. 30). Restitution is often a component of the traditional juvenile justice system, but it can also be a standalone response to juvenile delinquency or a component of restorative justice programs (3). While these programs do not always require a direct meeting with the offender, they still prioritize offender accountability and are consistent with the values of restorative justice included in the analysis (3).

The tenth article, the South Oxnard-based program reviewed by Turner et al., applied “corrections of place” theory and appeared to incorporate traditional probation supervision with other resources (17). This theory, created by Todd Clear, aims to apply theories of restorative justice and community policing to probation (17). The theory also seeks for “the state to facilitate a healing transaction” between offenders, victims, and the community instead of relying on the state through the correctional system (17, p. 4). Therefore, the program was managed by an interagency team, focused on the family as the level of intervention and provided numerous on-site services for offenders (mental health, drug treatment, parenting skills, mediation) and victims (mediation specialists and direct contact with victims) (17, p. 9). The goal of the program was to “reduce juvenile crime...by bringing together the juvenile justice system, offenders and their families, human services, victims and the community, as partners in the strategies needed to make change,” and therefore did meet the restorative justice criteria of victim/community inclusion and offender accountability to be included in this analysis (17, p. xi).

D. Types of Crimes Included

Since diversion and restorative justice programs are often considered more lenient punishments for crime, these programs tend to deal with lower-level offenses. Five of the ten articles in this analysis reviewed programs that dealt with these types of cases, including misdemeanors, drug/alcohol possession, status offenses, vandalism, and traffic violations (9, 11, 12, 16, 17). However, four of the ten articles covered programs that also took more serious, occasionally felony, offenses, such as aggravated assault, burglary, and robbery (8, 10, 13, 14). In an analysis of six different Victim Offender Reconciliation Programs in California, Evje & Cushman concluded that a “firm financial footing and well-trained, very skilled mediators” were key for programs to be able to take on more serious cases (8, p. 14).

E. Research Results

This analysis also focused on the methods and results of each included study. Overall, the findings regarding the effectiveness of restorative justice programs were mixed: While five of the studies found a significant reduction in recidivism compared to the control group, five found no significant difference between groups. In addition, no study concluded that the restorative justice diversion program had significantly higher recidivism rates than the control. Despite a lack of conclusive evidence, however, eight of the ten articles – including three of the five that found no difference – determined that the restorative justice diversion program reviewed was a better alternative to the traditional juvenile justice system. Table 2 below summarizes the key research conclusions for each individual article. A key issue that warranted further examination was the wide variety in how recidivism and other program outcomes were measured. This differential operationalization leads to challenges in understanding, contextualizing, and generalizing research on restorative justice programs.

F. Recidivism Measurements

Immense variety can be seen in how recidivism was operationalized and measured. The National Institute of Justice defines recidivism as “criminal acts that resulted in rearrest, reconviction, or return to prison with or without a new sentence during a three-year period following the person’s release” (7). However, only one article explicitly measured recidivism within a three-year period (16). While the limited time and resources available for conducting research studies may not permit a three-year study, it would be beneficial for studies to measure recidivism in a more consistent time

Table 2: Research Conclusions Summarized	Recidivism Measure	Comparison Group	Conclusion – Reduced Recidivism?	Other Measures	Conclusion- Recommend Alternative?
Evje & Cushman (2000)² (8)	Within 3, 6, 9 months, Within 1 year, Time to 2 nd apprehension	Juveniles that did not participate in program (traditional court processing)	Yes	Restitution paid, Victim satisfaction, Offender satisfaction, Completion of agreement	Yes
Bergseth & Bouffard (2007) (9)	# of new offenses, Seriousness of later offenses, Likelihood of re-offense (months/years)	Juveniles in traditional court processing	Yes	N/A	Yes
Cunningham (2007) (10)	Within 1 year, Time to 2 nd apprehension	Juveniles that received warnings and court processing	No	N/A	Yes
Forgays & DeMilio (2005) (11)	# of new offenses, Seriousness of later offenses	Random sample of first-time juvenile offenders placed in Court Diversion	Yes	Offender satisfaction, Offender self-view, Completion of agreement	Yes
Jacobsen (2013) (12)	New convictions	Juveniles in Community Accountability Board and Staff Assignment	No	N/A	No
Niemeyer & Shichor (1996) (13)	Within 1 year, Within 2 years	Juveniles referred to program but did not participate	No	Community service, Restitution paid, Willingness to participate, Victim satisfaction	Yes
Griffith (1983) (14) & Griffith (1983b) (15)	Time to 2 nd apprehension, # of new offenses, Seriousness of later offenses, Self-reported recidivism	Juveniles incarcerated for a week, followed by 3 months' probation	No	Education status, Employment status, Self-report response rate	Yes
Stone (2000) (16)	Within 1 year, Within 2 years, Within 3 years, Within 4 years	Juveniles from Juvenile Detention Alternative Initiative	Yes	N/A	Yes
Turner et al. (2002) (17)	# of new offenses, Petitions filed & sustained	Random sample of juveniles on probation	No	Community service, Restitution paid, Completion of agreement, Education status, Drug/alcohol use	No
Wilson (1982) (18)	Re-offense while in program	Juveniles on probation/incarcerated	Yes	Completion of agreement	Yes

² Provided summarized analysis of six different Victim Offender Reconciliation Programs in California

Table 2. Research Conclusions Summarized

period, thus allowing for easier analysis and comparison across programs.

Further benefits would be seen through greater consistency regarding the type of event that is measured for recidivism: Some programs measured new apprehensions/arrests (8, 10, 14), some measured new convictions (12), and others still did not specify which variable was used in their recidivism measure (9, 11, 13, 17, 18). In addition, many of the studies only included the recidivism event of interest that occurred in the same area of jurisdiction as the original offense (12, 13).

However, this does not adequately capture true re-offense rates; this is especially problematic for juveniles that may be precariously housed or moving frequently.

G. Other Measurements

While all the examined studies focused on recidivism as the primary measure of the effectiveness of a restorative justice diversion program, six of the ten studies also included other measures that indicate the success and benefits of restorative justice diversion

programs (8, 11, 13, 15, 17, 18).

Three studies included measures of the community service performed and monetary restitution paid by offenders involved in the programs (8, 13, 17). For example, Niemeyer & Shichor's study on a Victim Offender Reconciliation Program (VORP) found that over \$86,000 had been collected in restitution payments and that juveniles charged with tagging or graffiti-related offenses agreed to 27,699 hours (about 3 years) of related community service (13). The Santa Ana Police Chief noted that this work allowed the department to save over \$200,000 in salary costs (13). The translation of service work required by the VORP program to tangible savings and benefits to the community was a notable way to demonstrate the additional benefits of restorative justice in comparison to traditional juvenile justice practices. This was cited as one of the reasons for still recommending restorative justice, despite this program not significantly reducing recidivism (12). In the other studies, restitution payments ranged from \$29 to \$271 per juvenile, and the average amount of community service ranged from 15 to 25 hours (8, 17).

Further, four studies calculated completion rates for the programs overall and for individual agreements that came from meetings between offender and victim (when applicable to program style) (8, 11, 17, 18). For example, in their study of the Teen Court model in Whatcom County, Washington, Forgays & DeMilio found that 81% of Teen Court offenders completed their sentence versus 50% of the control group (11). Similarly, the Juvenile Restitution Project in Ventura County, California, had "full compliance with original order" in 65.1% of cases, and an additional 12.7% "compliance with adjusted order," while the probation control group showed 58.2% full compliance (18, Table VII). Juveniles in the Juvenile Restitution Project were occasionally given a new "adjusted" order if they could not meet the requirements of the original agreement, but this did not occur for juveniles on probation in the study (18). Similarly, completion rates for the California VORP programs ranged from 70-93% (8).

Finally, three studies included measures related to victim and offender satisfaction (8, 11, 13). For instance, rates of victim participation were measured by Niemeyer & Shichor for the Ventura County VORP program (13). The authors found that, depending on the severity of the crime, 58%-79% of victims in all cases agreed to meet with the offender, and that "lack of confidence in the offender's goodwill, fear, or anger" was only used as a reason to not participate in 9% of cases (13, p. 32). In their conclusion, Niemeyer & Shichor note that 49% of victim-offender meetings resulted in agreements without restitution, which they considered to be an indication that victims benefit from contact and discussion with

their offenders even without monetary motivation (13). Restorative justice practices such as victim-offender conferencing allow the victim's voice to be included in the conversation, resulting in victims' increased perception of fairness and justice in comparison to the traditional court process (3). Notably, even when victims are given a voice, they frequently are interested in factors outside of simply recovering lost value and have the interests of the offender in mind (8, 13). Across the six different VORP programs studied in California, Evje and Cushman found that victims are "more interested in an agreement in which the juvenile agrees to change his attitude and behavior than they are in recovering their losses" (8, p. 31). Victim support for the well-being and development of the juvenile demonstrates the core value of restorative justice in maintaining the offender as a valued member of the community.

To understand offender satisfaction with participation in a restorative justice program, two interesting measures were used by Forgays & DeMilio in their analysis of a Teen Court program. First, after participation, each offender was asked about their experience (11). The authors found that 73% of offenders found their sentence to be "very fair or fair enough," 20% found it "too harsh," and 4% "too easy" (11, p. 114). In addition, 88% felt that they understood the court process, and 82% would "recommend the Teen Court option to a friend who had committed a similar crime" (11, p. 114). Second, the authors employed the Harter Self-View Profile to measure the juvenile offenders' "sense of self-worth" (11, p. 115). The Profile asks juveniles to "rate himself or herself in relation to other adolescents" on measures such as academic ability, physical appearance, and romantic appeal (11, p. 112). The authors found that there was no statistically significant difference between the Teen Court youth and other juveniles of the same age (11). However, they note that this is a useful measure to assess juveniles in restorative justice programs because "an inflated positive self-worth may be less responsive to interventions" while "the stated desire to behave differently" may allow a juvenile to be more accepting of to a restorative justice approach (11, p. 115). Since restorative justice requires that juvenile offenders take direct responsibility for their actions, it follows that juveniles that indicate a desire to change will be more receptive of the practice.

Overall, while these types of measurements are less tangible and difficult to capture, they are crucial to the restorative justice perspective. Restorative justice principles focus on restoring community, and an important way to determine whether that occurred is by asking offenders and victims about their experiences.

H. Article Recommendations

The conclusions of each study consider both recidivism and supplemental measures of program success and seek to make recommendations for the future of restorative justice diversion programs. Five of the ten articles found a statistically significant reduction in recidivism. For instance, the VOC program in Clay County, Minnesota measured recidivism as any official contact with the justice system (9). Within six months of completion, 27.7% of juveniles that went through the traditional court system had a new contact, compared with only 12.8% of juveniles in the restorative justice program (9). Within one year, 35.5% of juveniles in the traditional court system had official contact, compared to 12.8% of juveniles in the restorative justice program (9). Both comparisons are statistically significant and more conservative, given the rates for the restorative justice program included juveniles that were assigned to but refused to participate (9).

As previously mentioned, eight of the ten articles recommend the restorative justice diversion programs as a better alternative to traditional juvenile justice options. This includes three of the five studies that did not find a significant decrease in recidivism due to the programs. Only two studies did not explicitly recommend diversion through restorative justice, although in both cases this stemmed from a lack of confidence in the specific program examined and the associated research, not restorative justice principles or the concept of diversion in general (12, 17). For instance, Jacobsen cited concerns regarding any attempt to draw conclusions from the study of a Teen Court program in Clallam County, Washington, given the small sample size and issues related to volunteer training and program structure (12). Turner et al. criticized the South Oxnard challenge project program and the “corrections of place” theory on which the program was supposed to be based, stating that “corrections of place” is supposed to “work outside the criminal justice system,” but in the case of Ventura County, there were no outside community members involved (17, p. 74). The authors concluded that the program “may have attempted to change too many things in the community” and was not well-suited for the needs of Ventura County (17, p. xv). These two articles highlight key limitations in restorative justice and the successful implementation of programs.

A majority of the articles did recommend the restorative justice diversion program analyzed, even if it did not significantly reduce recidivism. Many authors pointed to the other measures of success for restorative justice, such as the reduced cost (10, 13, 14, 16), reduced trauma for the juvenile (10, 11), and victim satisfaction (8, 13), to argue that the collateral benefits of restorative

justice alone make these programs a better alternative to the current system. The study by Cunningham, based in Australia, did not find a reduction in recidivism, yet concluded that the warning and victim-offender conferences were better alternatives to the traditional court system because most juveniles did not reoffend within a year, meaning that the court process “exposes [juveniles] to an unnecessary and possibly damaging experience” (10, p. 6). In other words, Cunningham argues that the seriousness associated with the court process can induce trauma for juveniles and that the court system is not an effective deterrent, so the time and resources poured into traditional court proceedings may cause more harm than good (10).

Echoing Cunningham, Griffith found that juveniles in the restitution group in Ada County, Idaho, had lower self-reported delinquency levels, higher school attendance rates, and fewer delinquent friends in comparison to the control group of incarcerated juveniles (15). These findings agree with the conclusions by Cunningham concerning the possibility of the traditional juvenile justice system exposing low-risk youth to traumatizing experiences or friends that might encourage future delinquency. Finally, focusing on the benefits of victim-offender conferencing programs, Niemeyer & Shichor cited “a better understanding between the victims and the offenders” and “durable” victim-offender agreements as highlights of the program in comparison to the traditional juvenile system, which ignores victim needs (13, p. 34).

IV. DISCUSSION

There are several limitations leading to a lack of generalizability from the findings of this analysis, clearly a reflection of the studies examined herein. First, it is important to keep in mind that these studies were conducted between 1979 and 2010, with most data being collected in the 80s to 90s (8, 13-18). Thus, the data used in most of these studies are from over 25 years ago, limiting the applicability of these findings to the style and function of current restorative justice diversion programs. Second, there are no clear programmatic differences between those diversion programs that reduced recidivism (8, 9, 11, 16, 18) and those programs that had no impact on recidivism (10, 12-14, 17). Third, the studies used a wide variety of sources for comparison groups; for example, some programs compared to juveniles in other types of diversion programs (10-12, 16), while others compared to juveniles in traditional probation or incarceration (13, 17, 18). Finally, the range of measures used to capture recidivism and other indicators of program success make it impossible to draw significant conclusions from this collection of studies.

Nevertheless, the mixed evidence from the examined studies highlights the importance of newer standardized research on restorative justice diversion programs. There are three key takeaways from this research that can guide future research and assessment on restorative justice programs, and juvenile restorative justice diversion programs in particular:

1. *Pay more attention to the quality of juvenile restorative justice diversion programs.* Future research should ensure that juvenile restorative justice programs embrace and follow the goals and intentions of restorative justice. Implementing theory into practice is difficult, and there is no one-size-fits-all model, so continued attention to the needs of the specific community is essential. In addition, programs that do not effectively uphold the guiding principles of restorative justice should not be considered for future research, since the findings will not be a true reflection of restorative justice programs.
2. *Standardize how success is measured.* Individual restorative justice diversion programs should measure recidivism in a clear and consistent way, thereby eliminating the need for researchers to collect data on their own. While availability may vary from location to location, it is also important to keep control groups as consistent as possible across studies; for example, restorative justice diversion programs could be compared to juveniles on probation or incarcerated juveniles. Most importantly, if random assignment is not possible, the control group should share similar characteristics to the experimental group, such as demographics and type of crime committed.
3. *Expand measurements of success beyond recidivism.* Restorative justice diversion programs aim to improve outcomes such as recidivism along with the actual experience of justice for all parties in comparison to the traditional juvenile justice system. Restorative justice is about repairing harm to the victim and the community while teaching the offender accountability and restoring the offender back to the community. All these benefits should be highlighted and measured.

Improved research practices for restorative justice diversion programs could have important policy implications. More consistent research measurement practices would lead to more definitive conclusions about the value of diversion through restorative justice

programs and its abilities to reduce recidivism. Further, using measures of outcome beyond recidivism could indicate benefits of restorative justice that the traditional juvenile system is incapable of providing. For instance, even if a program does not see significant differences in recidivism, the other benefits – such as reduced cost of proceedings, community service hours completed, and victim and offender satisfaction – could make restorative justice preferable. Demonstration of these benefits could help increase the number of restorative justice diversion programs available for juveniles and help existing programs get more funding.

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Paisley Hahn ('24) is majoring in Criminology and French & Francophone studies. She completed this project as an Honors Independent Study and is currently working on an Honors Senior Thesis. On campus, Paisley is involved in Philly Justice Project and is the President of the French Honor Society. After graduation, Paisley hopes to pursue a PhD in criminal justice, focusing her studies on criminal justice reform and improving police-community relations.



Mentor

Allison Ann Payne, PhD

Allison Ann Payne is the Chair of and a Professor in the Department of Sociology and Criminology. Her research interests include school-based crime and delinquency prevention, restorative justice in schools, interpersonal and cyber bullying, school climate, and school discipline and security.