

Restorative Justice in the Age of Artificial Intelligence: A Compassionate Approach to Juvenile Reform and Social Healing

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Abstract: *Neither a novel nor a traditional approach Restorative Justice has come to aid the penal system to remove the remorse and aid the reoffending nature in offenders. Juveniles are young people, who are still growing and have special rights and protections. Society should support them instead of judging them harshly. Restorative justice is a idea that focuses on healing victims and fixing broken relationships. It is important to help those who are hurt and offer comfort to those in need. Studies show that restorative justice can lower repeat offenses, help people return to their communities and improve the mental health of both offenders and victims. The RJ system is rather victim centered rather than the traditional offender centric. The advent of Artificial Intelligence in criminal justice system has further widened the scope and application of RJ and also ensured that made it more scientific in approach. However, there are challenges like uneven use and cultural differences that can make it less effective.*

Keywords: Restorative Justice, Recidivism, Juveniles Offenders, Artificial Intelligence, Victim

1. Introduction

Juvenile delinquency is a major societal problem, causing harmful emotional, physical, and financial effects throughout the community (Tarolla et al., 2002). Research since 2000 shows imprisonment inadequately addresses young offenders' rehabilitation and developmental needs. Confinement frequently results in adverse behavioural and psychological outcomes, including continued criminal activities and justice system involvement (Lambie & Randell, 2013). The juvenile justice system, provides mental health assessments and treatment services for its youth (Underwood & Washington, 2016). Implementing effective intervention strategies is crucial for reducing juvenile delinquency rates and reduction of reoffending (Lipsey, 2000). Across the globe, young offenders are generally handled separately from adults and face less harsh treatment; the 'Beijing Rules'² stress the importance of countries creating a legal framework specifically for juvenile offenders, including the organisations and entities associated with the juvenile justice administration. These guidelines aim to serve the varied needs of young offenders while ensuring their basic rights are protected (Richards, 2011).

Effective interventions are crucial in preventing youth from engaging in delinquent behaviours from the outset. School-based programs have the potential to mitigate drug use, delinquency, antisocial behaviour and early dropout rates. Furthermore, Greenwood emphasises the importance of community programs that can redirect first-time offenders away from further interactions with the justice system. The most effective community programs concentrate on family dynamics and provide adults responsible for supervising and training the child with essential skills (Greenwood, 2008). The

rehabilitative model of juvenile justice prevailed until rising youth violence in the late twentieth century prompted a shift in public opinion and policy toward holding youths to adult standards of criminal accountability. During this period, lawmakers overlooked developmental distinctions between adolescents and adults but however their views are being reconsidered. The justice system's principle of "adult time for adult crime"³ is increasingly seen as failing to account for age and immaturity in criminal punishment (Scott & Steinberg, 2008).

2. Restorative Justice

Originally conceptualised as an alternative framework within the penal justice system, restorative justice emphasises healing and reconciliation among offenders, victims and their communities. Its scope has since broadened to encompass the reintegration of individuals in political and ethnic conflicts at both national and international levels (Menkel-Meadow, 2007). Restorative justice is both a novel and ancient concept. While its modern expression and terminology have developed over the last few decades, its core principles and values are consistent with those found in traditional methods of resolving conflicts. This theory of justice focuses on mending the damage caused or exposed by criminal acts, primarily through processes that are inclusive and collaborative (Ness, 2005). Restorative justice presents a framework that emphasises the relationships among crime victims, offenders and the criminal justice system. Advocates of restorative justice contend that conventional perspectives on these relationships may be flawed: victims should occupy a central role in the process rather than being marginalised, victims and offenders are not inherently adversarial, victims do not primarily seek retribution in their quest for justice and

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² The United Nations' (1985: 2) Standard Minimum Rules for the Administration of Juvenile Justice is also known as the Beijing Rules. These guidelines stress the importance of countries creating a legal framework specifically for juvenile offenders, as well as for the organizations and entities involved in juvenile justice administration. These guidelines aim to cater to the varied needs of young offenders while ensuring their basic rights are protected.

³ Roper v. Simmons., 543 U.S. 551 (2005), the Supreme Court of United States abolished the juvenile death penalty, adjudging it as cruel and unusual punishment, citing adolescents' immaturity as making them less culpable compared to the adult offender.

incarceration may not be the most suitable means of preventing recidivism (Sherman et al., 2007).

The contemporary restorative justice movement traces back to efforts beginning in North America in the early 1970s. Starting with small-scale projects in U.S and Canada, the movement has expanded over the last 35 years, establishing thousands of restorative justice programs worldwide. Victim-offender mediation gained recognition from leading professional bodies, including the association of the American Bar in 1994 and the National Association for Assistance in 1995. It has been legislatively endorsed in various regions, with New Zealand being a notable example, and has received backing from the European Council, The European union and the United Nations (Marshall. C.D., 2020). Those who advocate the traditional approach argue that RJ often fail to address the needs of victims, offenders and communities, leaving harm unresolved. They endorse strategies designed to make offenders aware of their harm's impact and obligation to make amends through reparative actions. These efforts, they assert, can facilitate forgiveness and reconciliation, help reintegrate offenders into the community, and aid in healing victims' trauma. However, achieving these objectives (Johnstone & Van Ness, 2013).

Restorative justice (RJ) represents principles that assume a benevolent, empathetic and rational human nature. It suggests victims have capacity for generosity towards wrongdoers, that offenders can show remorse for their actions, that their "communities of care" can participate in providing support, and that a facilitator can guide discourse and foster consensual decision-making among conflicting parties (Daly, 2006). One prominent framework for understanding restorative justice (RJ) within criminology is Braithwaite's "reintegrative shaming theory (Braithwaite, 2002)." This theory acknowledges wrongdoing's impact on perpetrator and victims. Shaming can occur through direct actions, such as requiring a student's public apology, or indirect actions, like a teacher expressing disappointment to a parent (Fronius et al., 2016). Restorative justice conceptualises crime as a disruption to individuals and communities. In contrast, retributive justice emphasises adherence to rules and laws, often overlooking the harm inflicted upon victims by the offender and the crime itself. Consequently, retributive justice tends to regard victims as secondary. By focusing on harm, restorative justice prioritises the needs of victims, aiming to address and repair harm both materially and symbolically. Within the framework of retributive justice, accountability is equated with punishment, which offers limited incentives for offenders to comprehend the impact of their actions or to cultivate empathy towards victims (Zehr, 1997).

Restorative justice prioritises victims' needs and provides a mechanism for those affected by crime—victims, offenders, families, and community representatives—to address the harm inflicted. This approach can be applied formally and informally. Formally, it may be integrated into the criminal justice system at various stages, including pre-trial, pre-sentencing or pre-release programs. Informally, it resolves disputes within communities, neighbourhoods, families and between states. Cases are referred to restorative justice by

magistrates, prosecutors, and probation officers, often involving vandalism, property theft, car theft, burglary, shoplifting, attempted murder, assault, and domestic violence. It applies to male, female, and young offenders alike (Naude, 2006). In China, new criminal reconciliation legislation aligning with victim-offender mediation receives limited support. In Indonesia, restorative approaches are integrated across the criminal justice system, including domestic violence cases and drug trafficking courts. The application to domestic abuse is enabled by legislation allowing prosecutors to halt prosecutions based on restorative justice principles under specific circumstances. In Rwanda, the trial system led by the gacaca community enabled restoration of connections between their community and their survivors through community restorative justice (Procter-Legg et al., 2024).

3. Restorative Justice and Juvenile Offenders

The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC), established in 1989, serves to recognise the rights of children on a global scale. This legal framework advocates for the protection of individuals under the age of 18, acknowledging that children require special consideration due to their age and developmental needs. Consequently, the UNCRC delineates 40 specific rights for children, with particular emphasis on the special protection of 'children in conflict with the law' (Lambie & Randell, 2013). Considering the prevalent nature, persistence, and negative impacts of juvenile delinquency, along with the limited effectiveness of traditional treatments, it is crucial to develop successful interventions. Various treatment approaches have been suggested to address juvenile crime, focusing on individuals, families, schools, communities, and institutions, each showing different levels of proven success (Tarolla et al., 2002). Scholars investigating deviant behaviour are increasingly recognising that deviance is not an intrinsic characteristic of the individual engaging in the behaviour, nor of the behaviour itself. Instead, deviance is identified through the labels attributed to the behaviour, and a deviant is an individual who has been designated as such (Terry, 1967).

Young offenders frequently exhibit a high incidence of mood disorders. Disorders such as mania, ADHD, major depression and alcohol or substance abuse and dependence are particularly prevalent among teenagers held in an urban juvenile detention facility (Pliszka et al., 2000). In the case of *Kent v. United States*⁴, the Supreme Court concluded that restorative justice is an effective method for dealing with juvenile delinquency. This method seems to positively support the rights of offenders, victims, the community and society as a whole (Walgrave, 1998). Evaluations of restorative justice (RJ) programs show that victims and offenders report high satisfaction and compliance with restorative agreements. The traditional justice systems, which view crime as an offense against the state, in contrast restorative justice views crime as an injury to victims or communities or as relationship breaches. In conventional criminal processes, victims often have a limited role, whereas restorative justice prioritises their involvement through direct meetings with offenders (Bergseth & Bouffard, 2007).

⁴ *Kent v. USA*, 383 U.S. 541 (1966).

An elemental component of restorative justice initiative is the facilitation of dialogue or interconnection between the victim and the offender or a representative of the victim. Certain programs also incorporate family and community members into this process. It is imperative that both the young offender and the victim provide consent to participate in this dialogue. Illustrative examples of such programs include Conference models such as Family Group and Sentencing Circles and Victim-Offender Mediation (Wilson et al., 2017). While various models of restorative justice conferencing exist, four core assumptions form their foundation: 1) respect for family and extended family, focusing on enhancing familial and social support networks; 2) empowerment of all participants; 3) cultural sensitivity and respect towards families; and 4) victim involvement to ensure their needs are addressed in harm reparation. Studies have documented high levels of victim satisfaction (exceeding 90 percent), as well as offender satisfaction and perceptions of fairness from both parties regarding the conference process (Bradshaw & Roseborough, 2005). Juvenile victims have engaged in restorative justice (RJ) processes across various regions, including Australia, New Zealand, Canada, the United States and the United Kingdom. Although young victims have not been the primary focus of evaluation studies within these programs, existing data suggest that they are capable of participating in such processes. Moreover, their levels of satisfaction can be distinctly high, and well-being may be enhanced through participation in these processes (Gal & Moyal, 2011).

4. Restorative Justice and Recidivism

Restorative justice (RJ) initiatives have gained prominence both within the United States and on an international scale. These initiatives are often considered a viable alternative to traditional punitive measures, particularly for less severe and occasionally grave, cases of adult and juvenile offenses. The scheme demonstrates potential in achieving various objectives, such as enhancing victim and community engagement, increasing satisfaction, improving offender compliance, enhancing perceptions of justice and even reducing recidivism (Bradshaw & Roseborough, 2005). Procedural justice theory suggests that when individuals who have committed offenses perceive fairness in how their cases are handled and in the decision-making processes related to their criminal behaviour, they are more likely to view the law and legal authorities as legitimate. Studies show that this sense of legitimacy encourages offenders to comply with the

law, rather than dismissing the punishment as unfair or undeserved (Bouffard et al., 2017).

Restorative justice principles posit that interactive engagement among the victim, offender and community facilitates offenders' acceptance of responsibility for their actions, which appears to lead to a reduction in recidivism. The Juvenile Probation Department in Maricopa County seems to have implemented an effective restorative justice program⁵ that has successfully decreased recidivism rates among its participants (De Beus & Rodriguez, 2007). Although the potential to lower recidivism is just one of the claimed advantages of restorative justice (RJ) initiatives, the issue of reoffending remains a significant concern for policymakers who are considering RJ as an alternative to conventional court procedures. Many assessments of RJ programs have shown that both offenders and victims report high levels of satisfaction and adherence to restorative agreements (Piggott & Wood, 2018). Recidivism has big social and economic effects. When people commit crimes again, it keeps a cycle of crime going. This puts a lot of pressure on the justice system and the taxpayers who pay for it. It leads to crowded prisons, uses up police resources and costs the government a lot of money. Also, it often ignores the main reasons why people commit crimes, so the cycle continues. Using other methods instead of jail, like restorative justice, community service and diversion programs, shows that the justice system can help offenders in ways that meet their needs. This helps them change while keeping the community safe (Lin et al., 2023).

Advocates of restorative justice claim that this approach not only aids in the recovery of victims but also has the capacity to reform offenders, thus decreasing their chances of committing future offenses. Kerrigan's research explores the practice of victim-offender mediation as applied in Campbell Law School's Juvenile Justice Project (JJP)⁶, with a specific emphasis on its effectiveness in reducing recidivism among young participants. The results reveal that the project effectively achieved its goal of lowering the recidivism rate among juveniles (Kerrigan, 2007). The Canberra RISE⁷ findings indicated that offenders who participated in restorative justice conferences frequently reported enhanced perceptions of procedural justice. Furthermore, perceptions of procedural fairness and reintegration messages were associated with reduced self-reported recidivism and lower official reoffending rates in certain measures. These effects appeared to be mediated by the offenders' psychological engagement, particularly their sense of being respected (Tyler

⁵ The study examined diversion data from 1999 to 2001, as provided by the Maricopa County Juvenile Probation Department, to evaluate the influence of individual and community factors on program completion and recidivism rates among juveniles engaged in a restorative justice initiative. The results revealed that 89% of juveniles in the CJC program and 86% in the control group successfully completed their respective programs. Recidivism was noted in 20% of the CJC participants, compared to 32% in the control group. The mean age for both groups was fifteen, with males constituting 64% of the CJC participants and 58% of those in the control group.

⁶ In response to the growing number of young individuals entering the criminal justice system, law professors Jon Powell and Anthony Baker have developed an innovative initiative. They established the Juvenile Justice Project (JJP) at Campbell University's Norman

Adrian Wiggins School of Law, a victim-offender mediation program rooted in restorative justice principles. The JJP seeks to provide a forum where juvenile offenders and their victims can collaboratively address issues or wrongdoings and reach a mutually satisfactory resolution, thereby circumventing the need for the juvenile to undergo the court process.

⁷ The Canberra Rise initiative comprised a series of randomised field experiments conducted in Australia, aimed at comparing restorative justice conferences with traditional court processing. This study employs longitudinal data from the Australian Reintegrative Shaming Experiments (RISE), which concentrate on drinking and driving, to evaluate the long-term impacts of reintegrative shaming and procedural justice on legal support and subsequent recidivism, as evidenced by police records and self-reports.

et al., 2007). Skinner-Osei's research by employing the C.A.R. E⁸. model integrates restorative justice with re-entry strategies to enhance family reunification, engage communities in the reintegration process, and promote shared accountability. These initiatives aim to improve reintegration outcomes and reduce recidivism (Skinner-Osei & Osei, 2024).

A study conducted by Little and his colleagues utilizes propensity score matching to compare Indigenous and non-Indigenous youths at their initial restorative justice conference. Despite controlling for known risk factors associated with reoffending, Indigenous youth demonstrated significantly higher recidivism rates following the conference compared to their non-Indigenous counterparts. This finding suggests that conferencing alone is insufficient to address the underlying issue of Indigenous overrepresentation within the youth justice system (Little et al., 2018). The study of the MIR restorative justice conferencing program offers robust causal evidence indicating that restorative justice conferencing, as implemented through MIR⁹, can significantly decrease recidivism rates among youth charged with moderate felonies. Notably, reductions were observed in both short-term and long-term contexts (Shem-Tov et al., 2024).

5. AI Assistance in Restoration models

A recent study investigates 'ApoloBot', a tool integrated within Discord, aimed at facilitating online restorative justice through moderation driven by apologies. By involving moderators in actual communities, the authors discern the circumstances under which such tools prove effective and emphasise challenges such as authenticity and trust. The findings provide design insights for promoting healing rather than punishment in digital environments (Doan & Seering, 2025). Another, recent study investigates the utilisation of videoconferencing platforms by restorative practitioners for justice-related interventions. The researchers conducted six semi-structured focus group interviews with 22 restorative facilitators based in the United States to explore their experiences with the online delivery of restorative justice. The findings indicate that restorative facilitators maintain restorative values in their online practices by adhering to the facilitation process and promoting dialogue. Additionally, the study suggests that the Human-Computer Interaction (HCI) community can gain valuable insights from restorative practitioners regarding the cultivation and maintenance of intimacy and connection in online environments (Musgrave et al., 2025).

AI brings dynamic adaptability, personalised learning and cost-effective solutions, improving accessibility in correctional systems, as seen in Finland and the United States. AI-powered immersive technologies align with goals of providing equal opportunities for growth and employment. These tools boost employability by imparting market-relevant

skills and foster economic inclusion and lower recidivism rates, contributing to safer communities. By incorporating AI into immersive technologies, correctional programs can address vocational, educational, and emotional rehabilitation (Sousa et al., 2025). The integration of artificial intelligence in restorative justice processes can enhance the efficiency of case management, facilitate the analysis of conflict patterns and optimise the matching of victims and offenders. Additionally, it supports the documentation process, ensures compliance monitoring, and enables data-driven approaches to prevention (Teo, 2025).

6. Conclusion

Restorative justice can be effectively implemented, particularly among juvenile offenders. This approach has been successfully adopted in numerous countries to mitigate recidivism. The system is economically less burdensome and can be effective from a victim-centered perspective. The primary objective of all criminal justice systems is to control recidivism and children in conflict with the law require a more humane system of justice. The traditional incarceration model, which has not proven highly effective. The use of artificial intelligence in advancing restorative justice also enhances the system's scope, although it is imperative to develop suitably ethical models that do not compromise the rights of the child.

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⁸ C.A.R.E :-Collaborate, Amend, Reintegrate and Empower.

⁹ Make-It-Right Program; A randomized controlled trial was conducted from 2013-2019 by the San Francisco District Attorney's Office. This study targeted youth aged 13–17 facing medium-severity felony charges like burglary or assault. Eligible participants (n ≈ 143) were randomly assigned to: 1. The MIR restorative justice conferencing program, or 2. Standard criminal prosecution (control group). Key Findings were (1) MIR program participants were 19

percentage points less likely to be rearrested, a 44% reduction compared to the control group; (2) The recidivism reduction was sustained up to four years after random assignment.; (3) 81% of eligible participants enrolled, with 53% completing it. When considering take-up rates, the effect sizes for enrolment or completion were 1.3 to 1.9 times larger than the intent-to-treat (ITT) estimates.

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