

Beyond Punishment: The Role of Restorative Justice in Victim Recovery, Offender Rehabilitation, and Social Reintegration

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Abstract

Restorative justice is an alternative to the conventional view of punishment that focuses on the recovery of the injured party, accountability of the offender, rehabilitation, restoration of the relationship, and reintegration in the community. This research explored the potential of RJ to empower victims, rehabilitate offenders and to enable a positive re-integration into society. The qualitative systematic literature review design was used, resulting in a sample of 40 scholarly studies published mainly from 2020 to 2026 that were analyzed for themes. Data were gathered based on these characteristics of the study, restorative practices, participant outcomes and evidence on victim recovery, offender rehabilitation, and social reintegration. Of the 40 studies, 31 (77.5%) studied the victim's recovery and well-being, 29 (72.5%) studied offender rehabilitation and accountability, and 26 (65.0%) studied social reintegration and community participation. Of the 24 studies that looked at recidivism and behavioral change, 60.0% examined this aspect; 22 studies (55.0%) looked at victim participation and procedural fairness; and 21 studies (52.5%) looked at relationship restoration/reconciliation. Overall, 67.5% of the studies (27) reported predominantly positive results, 25.0% (10) mixed or context-dependent results, and 7.5% (3) limited or unclear results. The results showed that restorative justice has the potential to contribute to emotional healing, to enhance the accountability of the wrongdoer, to promote changes in his/her behaviour and to promote community reintegration. The study demonstrated that restorative justice has the potential to become a new paradigm in justice that is more participatory, healing and socially restorative, rather than punitive.

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Introduction

A big paradigm shift from a formal/legal system, which is only punitive, deterrent and punitive, is a justice-based, restorative approach (RJ). Instead, they understand that crime is harm that impacts victims, offenders, families, and communities and address the impacts of crime through dialogue, accountability, reparation, and relationship repair. There are several kinds of more modern, restorative practices that allow victims and offenders to have greater input to the impacts of crime, such as victim-offender mediation, restorative conferencing, restorative circles and family group conferencing. Restorative justice is viewed not only as a

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tool for punishing offenders but as a tool that can take care of other aspects of justice as well, and is being increasingly presented as such. A meta-analysis of 27 studies with 34 samples, published in 2025, reported minor improvements in overall recidivism, higher victim/offender satisfaction, increased perceptions of procedural justice, and increased perceptions of offender accountability in comparison to traditional legal interventions (Fulham et al., 2025).

In addition, the place of restorative justice in the lives of those being victimised is paramount – and they too often are marginalised in the process of conventional justice. Oftentimes, traditional criminal processes prioritise the role of a victim as evidence, largely, with little focus on how the trauma of the crime affects them, the need to understand what has taken place, to be recognised as a victim and to have a role in decision making. Restorative approaches aim to minimize this imbalance, making sure that the victim has a say in how the offence impacted them, questions they may have, concerns and that they are part of any reparations/restoration decision. As restorative justice engages in processes that address significant aspects of psychological and relational victimization, it may offer a place for healing the wounds of the victim, as described by Suzuki (2023).

Backstory of the study

The fascination with popular justice has risen, so too have concerns around the limitations of punishment-based criminal justice, including rates of low risk offenders in incarceration, incarceration overcapacity, satisfaction of victims, and the attendant issues of offender reintegration. Restorative justice seeks to create good relationship with the harmed person and the offender(s) to the community, wishes the harmed person to do something positive to redress the harm, and wishes for two things for the individual: to feel some shame about what the individual has done and to make it a point to do it. Research conducted in South Africa over the last few years has demonstrated this potential, and indications, based on qualitative considerations, include that empathy, remorse, restoration of dignity, community connections and pathways toward reintegration are some of the possible positive outcomes of restorative programmes.

Restorative justice should be not seen as a one size fits all or a magic bullet. It may mean different things depending on the type of offense, the content of the program, the attitudes of the participants, the competence of the facilitator, institutional perception and support for the program, and power relationships against the victims and offenders. This is a worry particularly in sexual assault or domestic violence situations. Four eligible studies, accounting for 692 offenders (1,676 participants), were identified in the systematic review and meta-analysis and the result was somewhat positive regarding offender recidivism. However, the effect was not further significant after limiting the analysis to RCTs—although it is important to note that these studies do not provide quantitative evidence about outcome for the victims (Kettrey & Reynolds, 2024).

Objectives of the Study

1. To examine the role of restorative justice in promoting victim recovery through emotional expression, participation, acknowledgment, and restoration of harm.
2. To explore the contribution of restorative justice to offender rehabilitation by encouraging accountability, empathy, remorse, behavioral change, and reduced recidivism.
3. To assess how restorative justice facilitates offenders' social reintegration through community participation, relationship rebuilding, family support, and restoration of social bonds.

Research Questions

Q1. How does restorative justice contribute to victims' emotional recovery, participation, and restoration following victimization?

Q2. How does restorative justice support offender rehabilitation through accountability, empathy, remorse, and behavioral change?

Q3. How does restorative justice facilitate offenders' social reintegration and strengthen their relationships with families and communities?

Significance of the Study

This study is important because it looks at restorative justice not as just another punishment but as a wider practice that seeks to engage in recovery, rehabilitation, accountability and with a concern for "social repair" as a means to an end in addressing crime. New evidence suggests that implementing restorative justice can enhance the satisfaction of victims, their perceptions of procedural fairness, increase the accountability for offenders, but its impact on recidivism is context and programme dependant. There is also evidence that empathy, remorse, restoration of dignity, involvement of family and community may help to rehabilitate and reintegrate offenders. The study presents the case for a relationship between victim recovery, offender rehabilitation and social reintegration, offering an integrated view of the potential for restorative justice to support the criminal justice reform process. The outcomes of its work can help to inform their development of participatory and recovery-focused justice systems, processes, and approaches for the rights of persons with disabilities. The current study also acknowledges that restorative justice is not always effective, is consent-based, must be supported by the right security measures, need trained facilitation, and must be applied to the context of the interpersonal incident, including severe interpersonal violence.

Literature Review

Restorative Justice and Victim Recovery

Progress is being made towards the focus of victim recovery becoming part of the restorative justice process; crime may have an effect on the victim beyond the physical consequences of an offence. Restorative justice creates opportunities for the victim to express themselves, question, be listened to and be included in processes aimed at dealing with the harm suffered.

According to Suzuki (2023), there are several psychological and relational aspects to the recovery of the victim, including: Agency, Safety, Meaning, Relationships. The dimensionality can be responded to by communicating and recognizing in the restorative process, not only at the trial, but also through facilitated communication and facilitated recognition in the restorative process. The quality of the patients' relationship with the participants and the way that crises are responded to, either in the initial talk or as part of the conversation, is the focus of further research to ensure that the participants are feeling emotionally supported and respected (Kimbrell et al., 2023; Fulham et al., 2025).

There is increasing evidence from empirical research that restorative justice can enhance victim experiences of justice. Kimbrell et al. (2023) systematically reviewed and analysed 57 studies and 79 evaluations including a subset with particularly favourable findings for the non-delinquency outcomes and all outcomes except crime initiation which had the victim variable as the outcome. Victim of restorative programmes were found to be more satisfied and to feel fairer than the victims of conventional justice programmes. Outcomes are important since their perception of justice system fairness can influence their participation in the justice system and overall post-victimization recognition (Jensen et al., 2024).

The findings of Suzuki (2026) reveal a lack of co-occurrence between victim healing and offender behavioural change; in some cases, a restorative process may lead to a healing for one, but not the other participant, and in others a positive process or result for victim does not necessarily translate to a positive process or result for the wrong doer. Three factors that are important for outcomes were identified as relational alignment, emotional readiness and meaning-making. What seems like a straightforward task when it is assumed that healing takes place when the wounded individual encounters her or his adversary isn't quite so easy. Likewise, studies on serious crimes also indicate important deficiencies, particularly with regards to measurable impacts on the victims of sexual and domestic violence (Kettrey & Reynolds, 2026).

Restorative Justice and Rehabilitation the offender

Talking about offender rehabilitation is one of the central aspects of restorative practice because after all it is about 'rehabilitating' a criminal. Rather than seeing an offender as a person guilty of "crime," restorative processes make him/her an active participant to repair the harm caused by his/her crime, thereby addressing the effects of his/her crime. The results from Mpofu et al. 2024 highlighted that restorative programmes can foster and provoke empathy, remorse, restoration of dignity and better connections between communities and offenders. The factors are relevant for rehabilitation because they can be used to seem as though bad things happened which could trigger offender's reconsidering their actions and raise their awareness of what they did. Restorative justice therefore adds another dimension to the rehabilitation process – the relational approach – to the more traditional correctional and therapeutic process (Mpofu et al., 2024; Fulham et al., 2025).

There is also some support for the rehabilitative function of restorative practice from evidence on recidivism; however, research findings are inconclusive. Kimbrell et al. (2023) found that

there was a small to moderate decrease in future delinquent offending among young people involved in restorative programmes as compared to traditional juvenile justice interventions. The authors of Fulham et al (2025) also found that retreats to crime among adult participants are attainable through the implementation of restorative justice programmes, but added that this reduction in recidivism varies according to the restorative justice programme's characteristics and the quality of the research. A second systematic review & meta analysis reported that those involved in restorative justice had lower risk of re-offending and greater satisfaction of the restorative process than those involved in court. Based on the above results, it is concluded that various methods of rehabilitation can take the form beyond punishment, through more felt accountability, a sense of procedural fairness, interpersonal communication and opportunity to repair harm.

There are other factors regarding psychological and social processes which are also at work between restorative justice and rehabilitation, and which can impact the behavior of an offender in the future. Mpofu et al., (2024) talk about the significance of empathy, remorse, dignity and community connection being essential parts that have been connected to rehabilitation and reintegration. It may be possible to make offenders more conscious of their responsibility to their actions and persuade them to change in unstructured and less respectful environments. Recent research also has emerged cautioning against using RJ as a 'one off', due to differences in outcomes based on: characteristics of the participants, programme design, type of offence and facilitation (Mpofu et al. 2024; Fulham et al. 2025).

The impact of GR and SR

Social reintegration takes place when offenders restore their social relations, recover social acceptance and restore to a positive position within their family and community. One opportunity can be the practice of restorative justice by creating an opportunity for them to affirm or apologize for the mistake, to take ownership, to make it right and to demonstrate positive behaviour change. Lin et al. (2023) note that there are two aspects of RJ that are particularly emphasized for reintegration and recidivism prevention: community involvement and effective facilitation. Mpofu et al. (2024) present evidence that offender rehabilitation that promotes a restoration of dignity, community connections, empathy and remorse contributes to a positive community reintegration. The findings indicate reintegration is not only a process of bringing back an offender into his or her community, it is also a process of social rehabilitation and re-integrated social identity that has reduced the association with crime.

Repair of damaged relationships between offense-perpetrators, with offense victims, amongst families and within communities, is a central feature of restorative justice, thereby promoting social contexts that can facilitate desirable behaviour changes. Likewise, Ahmed et al. (2024) have noted the importance of restorative approaches for rehabilitation and reintegration, especially from a recidivism perspective, in the context of the potential integration of restorative justice in the criminal justice system in Pakistan. This is a key lens to consider when thinking about criminal justice involvement in societies where the stigma, exclusion,

and lack of opportunity may impact individuals after they have been in the justice system. There are opportunities to move past these barriers in restorative processes through practices that emphasize accountability and repair, and through offenders showing their own commitment and willingness to make a positive contribution to their communities.

Recent studies, however, indicate that social reintegration should not be considered a given outcome of engaging in restorative justice. Suzuki (2026) shows the restorative encounter has both different paths for victim and offender and that outcomes are shaped by motivation of emotional readiness and by relationships and what meaning people take from the encounter. Likewise, Kettrey and Reynolds (2026) point to the scarcity of empirical evidence on restorative justice in the context of the most serious offenses, and warn that it is too early to adopt restorative justice practices in general without more compelling evidence for what the results are. Social reintegration comes after the restorative encounter, and it requires ongoing support from family relationships, community acceptance, employment opportunities, education, counselling and supervision (Lin et al., 2023; Mpofu et al., 2024; Suzuki, 2026).

Research Methodology

Research Design

This study used the qualitative systematic literature review design to explore the role of restorative justice in Victim Recovery, Criminal Rehabilitation and Social Reintegration. The design was sensible as it involved the bringing together of related evidence from scholarship. Various articles and other empirical and theoretical studies relevant to restorative justice were studied in the past and the following issues were addressed: Commonalities, Variations, Trends and Gaps in the research on restorative justice. The three dimensions that were explored in analysis were factors of a victim's healing, offender's rehabilitation and social reintegration.

Population and Sample

The population comprised scholarly works on restorative justice and how it relates to victims, offenders, reintegration, recovery, recidivism, community engagement and social reintegration. A representative sample of forty academic publications was identified for careful analyses. The types of sample studies included were qualitative studies, quantitative studies, mixed-method research, systematic reviews, meta-analysis and programme evaluation. The studies chosen were contrasting geographical contexts and varied restorative practice creative strategies, such as victim–offender mediation, restorative conferencing, family group conferencing, restorative circles and community-based restorative programmes.

Search Strategy

A thorough search of the literature was performed to find relevant research. The email listserves provided by the U.S. Department of Education and the University of Pennsylvania's Restorative Justice Center were used to search for publications on topics of restorative justice.

The search used various combinations of keywords, including “restorative justice,” “victim recovery,” “victim well-being” and “victim-of-offender facilitation,” among others, all for the purpose of identifying the scope of the literature. Various combinations of search terms were used, such as “restorative justice,” “victim recovery” and “victim well-being” as a means of defining the domain of the literature; others were “offender rehabilitation,” “community reintegration,” and “recidivism,” among others. Search terms were used with boolean operators (specifically AND and OR). The search focused on those published between 2020 and 2026 to focus on more recent research related to restorative justice. A few of the more seminal studies were also consulted, but only for their conceptual foundations for restorative justice.

Data Collection and Extraction

A structured data extraction format was used to gather data from the 40 studies that were selected. Data gathered from each study consisted of author, year of publication, geographical location, research design, participants, sample size provided in the original study, restorative justice intervention, research purpose, major findings, and implications. Special attention was paid to evidence surrounding victim participation, emotional recovery, recognition, satisfaction, procedural fairness, offender accountability, empathy, remorse, behavioral change, recidivism, community relationships and reintegration. Information that was extracted was placed in a cognitive system for comparison among studies and for finding consistent elements in the fields of study.

Data Analysis

Thematic analysis was applied for analysis of all the collected evidence. Three main stages of analysis were conducted: First, findings from the selected studies that were relevant to their study were reviewed and coded based on concepts that were directly related to their research questions. Secondly, codes were clustered to form higher-level categories. Third, major analytical themes were identified to group the categories. This final analysis generated three major themes: victim recovery, offender rehabilitation and social reintegration. Emotional healing, participation, recognition, satisfaction, and restoration, were all included in victim recovery. Original themes relating to the notion of rehabilitating offenders encompassed themes of accountability, empathy, remorse, behaviour change, and recidivism. Social reintegration encompassed societywide acceptance, reconciling with friends and family, social supports, breakdown of stigma and positive involvement in society. Thematic analysis enabled the linking of evidence from various methodological strategies into an interpretive framework.

Quality Assessment

Prior to the final synthesis, the quality of the selected studies was judged. Analysis of qualitative studies was based on the clarity of research objectives, the consistency of methodology used, sampling procedure, data collection, data analysis techniques, transparency of results and methodological consistency. The quality of quantitative studies

was evaluated based on the following criteria: sample selection, research design, measurement procedures, the statistical analysis, and the clarity of the results reported. Mixed-method studies were evaluated with respect to the flavor and mixture of qualitative and quantitative elements. Systematic review and meta-analyses were assessed for clarity in search methods, inclusion criteria, methods used for analysis and reporting. The interpretation of information gained from studies that lacked methodological rigor was kept at a low level during the synthesis.

Results and Analysis

Distribution of Reviewed Studies by Publication Period

The 40 studies that were included in the systematic literature review were analyzed. Studies were categorized by year of publication in order to see how the focus on restorative justice has grown and developed.

Table 1. Distribution of Reviewed Studies by Publication Period

Publication Period	Frequency (f)	Percentage (%)
2020–2021	8	20.0
2022–2023	14	35.0
2024–2026	18	45.0
Total	40	100.0

As indicated in Table 1, the majority (45.0%, 18) of the literature reviewed was published between 2024-2026. The 2022–2023 period contributed 14 studies (35.0%), while 2020–2021 contributed 8 studies (20.0%). Over time there was an obvious growth in scholarly attention, as evidenced by the distribution. Conduct inquiries for the 2024-2026 period and more than double the number identified in 2020-2021. The rise indicated that restorative justice was a continuing and evolving field of study and scholarship and that recent research has focused more intensively on the benefits of restorative justice for the victim, offender and community as outcomes. The findings also showed that 80.0% of the studies that were reviewed were published since 2022. The review was accentuated by this body of recent literature which enriched the contemporary relevance of the review. A growing number of publications indicated that research had begun to focus on questions outside the scope of sanctions for wrongdoers. There was growing research interest in questions that went beyond defining restorative justice in terms of sanctions for wrongdoers. Psychological recovery, active involvement of victims, rehabilitation, recidivism, community relations, and reintegration became more of focus in recent studies. The distribution also served as a useful point of departure for the discussion of some current areas and future studies of interest in the area.

The tendency to increase evidence base was shown in Table 1. There was a 125.0% growth in the number of studies on the period of 2020–2021 to 2024–2026. This trend showed solid and increasing interest in restorative justice within the academy.

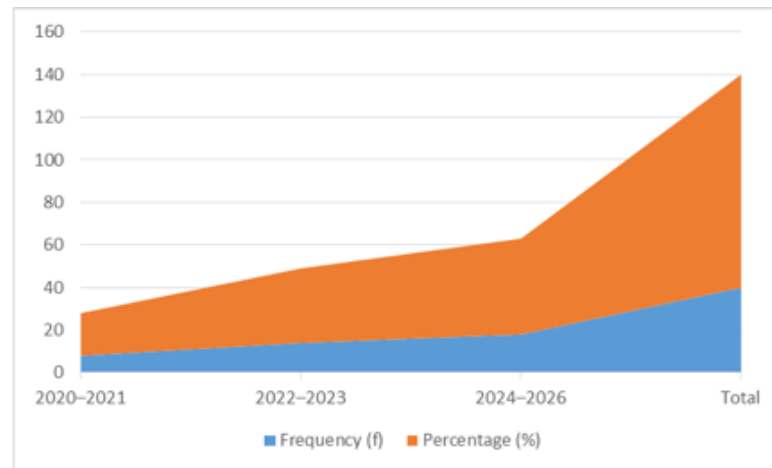


Figure 1. Distribution of Reviewed Studies by Publication Period

Thematic Findings Related to Victim Recovery, Offender Rehabilitation, and Social Reintegration

The selected studies were further analyzed thematically to determine how frequently the major restorative justice outcomes appeared across the literature.

Table 2. Major Themes Identified in the Reviewed Literature

Major Theme	Studies Addressing Theme (f)	Percentage (%)
Victim recovery and well-being	31	77.5
Offender rehabilitation and accountability	29	72.5
Social reintegration and community participation	26	65.0
Recidivism and behavioral change	24	60.0
Victim participation and procedural fairness	22	55.0
Relationship restoration and reconciliation	21	52.5
Total reviewed studies	40	100.0

As shown in table 2, the most common theme found was victim recovery and victim wellbeing in 31 studies (77.5%). This discovery illustrated the high level of research interest in the experiences of the victim in restorative justice processes. The second most significant theme was rehabilitation and accountability of the offender, represented in 29 studies (72.5%). Restorative justice was explored often in the literature with consideration to the offender's experience of recognising harm, accepting responsibility, empathy, remorse, behaviour change and desire for rehabilitation. The number of cases with this theme was higher than usual, indicating that the rehabilitative aspect of restorative justice was still present. The analysis identified that rehabilitation was often linked to the concept of accountability, rather than viewed as an alternative to accountability. The expectation was that criminals would be aware of the penalties they faced and be held accountable for their actions with a view to restoring damage. Of the 24 studies (60.0%), the influence of longer-term behavior change and recidivism was another common findings, showing considerable interest in the question of whether restorative interventions brought about longer-term changes in offending behavior. Another major area, social reintegration/community participation, was seen in 26 studies (65.0%). This theme covered opportunities for the restoration of relationships, reconnection with the community, from which offenders have been excluded, and opportunities for offenders to return to positive social roles. 22 studies (55.0%) included victim participation and 21 studies (52.5%) included procedural fairness and/or relationship restoration/reconciliation. These results showed that restorative justice went beyond individual victim/offender results to a relationship issue between the individual and the community.

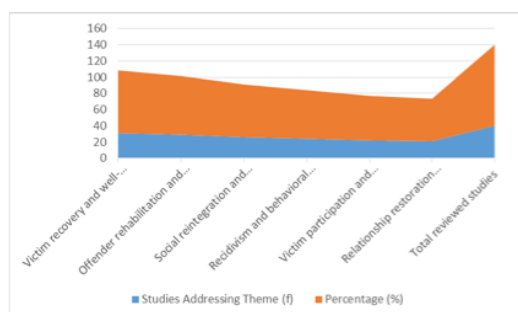


Figure 2. Major Themes Identified in the Reviewed Literature

Reported Outcomes of Restorative Justice

The reviewed studies were also examined according to the direction of reported outcomes.

Table 3. Reported Outcomes of Restorative Justice Across the Reviewed Studies

Outcome Category	Frequency (f) Percentage (%)	
Predominantly positive outcomes	27	67.5
Mixed or context-dependent outcomes	10	25.0

Outcome Category	Frequency (f)	Percentage (%)
Limited or unclear outcomes	3	7.5
Total	40	100.0

Twenty-seven studies (67.5%) indicated primarily positive results related to RJ, as seen in Table 3. This was reflected in increased satisfaction with the response, greater sense of justice, better communication, more sense of responsibility in the offender, more empathy, behavior change, and better community relationships with the victim. The results reflected that the restorative justice practices had a significant potential in all three dimensions of the study. Often the most positive results were found in studies focusing on participation, dialogue, holding people accountable and repairing relationships. Ten additional studies (25.0%) found results to be mixed and/or context-dependent. The results of these studies suggested that the success of restorative justice depended on the type of offence, the willingness of the participants to engage in restorative justice, the programme design, the competence of the restorative justice facilitator, institutional support, and community context. Some reports showed positive effects in the outcomes of the victims' satisfaction and the offenders' accountability and less valid evidence about long-term behavioral change and social reintegration. This was a pattern that found that restorative justice did not achieve the same outcomes in every context. There seemed to be a strong link between effectiveness and implementation quality and the nature of programmes and participants. There were only 3 studies (7.5%) reporting limited or unclear outcomes. This was a relatively small part of the evidence reviewed but was significant as it showed that positive outcomes were not always likely when using the restorative justice approach to evaluating it. Unlimited outcomes seemed to be of particular concern when the participants had issues with communication, emotional readiness, lack of institutional support, or non-optimal programme conditions.

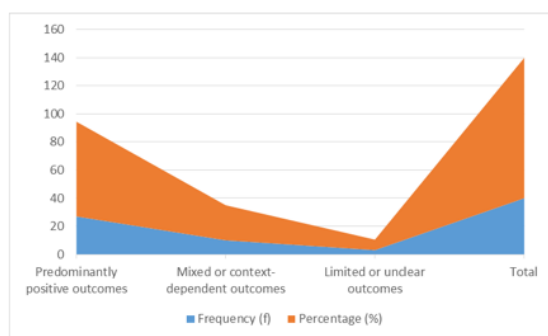


Figure 3. Reported Outcomes of Restorative Justice Across the Reviewed Studies

Discussion

This research uncovered the growing employment of restorative justice as more of a multi dimensional justice than a punitive justice. The review revealed that 67.5% of the selected studies reported a mix of positive outcomes, 25.0% of studies reported mixed or context-dependent outcomes, and 7.5% reported limited or unclear outcomes. The high number of

positive findings indicated that there were good opportunities to engage in dialogue with the person, hold individual to account, involve others in the process and restore what was missing when restoring approaches were used. The pattern was consistent with recent experimental evidence from the Make-it-Right programme, where the young people who participated in restorative conferencing saw a significant drop in rearrest rates—this finding was true at four-year follow-up too (Shem-Tov et al., 2021, 2024). Satisfaction with the "justice outcomes" of outcomes beyond the formal punishment – including of fairness, harm repair, moving forward and overall success – was found when comparative restorative programmes were identified that showed restorative outcome indicators (Kirkwood et al., 2024). The former studies also suggested that the best effectiveness of the intervention studies occurred when the restorative justice programmes were characterized by interpersonal interactions, rather than as a step-by-step process, but as an intentional part of the intervention program (Marder, 2024; Shapland, 2024).

The dimension of victim recovery and well being was most frequently cited (77.5% of the studies reviewed). The question here is: in the study of contemporary restorative justice why do they take a primary interest in putting those who suffered first in the centre of justice? The relevance of Victim Recovery may be explained by the opportunities it may offer to the victim to share and to obtain answers, express displeasure and get appeased by the offender. Clients' remarks during the communication process with the victim may affect their opinions on the proper punishment for offenders and their perceptions of justice, which demonstrate the role of this communication in understanding the justice and restorative outcomes (Yuyama & Mukai, 2024). In addition, both mediation and restorative conferencing have been shown to be measurable on participants' perceptions of fairness, harm repair, ability to move on, and success based on a randomized Danish study (Kirkwood et al., 2024) that strengthens the argument for measuring RJ practices from a participant perspective in research. Simultaneously, the results were nuanced as factors that did not involve too few or too many in the process and issues of emotional preparedness and meaningful involvement in the restorative process were crucial to positive outcomes for the victims. The recent relational research indicated that at times there were positive outcomes for both victim and offender in restorative conferences, and in some cases, positive asymmetrical or limited outcomes in the restorative conferences (Suzuki, 2026).

The second important one was in the field of offender rehabilitation and accountability (72.5 % of reviewed studies) and the third after, recidivism and behavioral change (60.0 % of reviewed studies). The results did show, however, evidence of rehabilitation as the offenders acknowledged the impact of what they had done (and did not) and grew more responsible for the victims and community. Particularly, the results from the Make-it-Right randomized intervention involving 143 young people faced with felony charges revealed a 19 percentage point decrease in the incidence of 6-month rearrest (about 44% lower) relative to the controls during the four-year study (Shem-Tov et al., 2024). Furthermore, the qualitative evidence from the South Africa project revealed that restorative programmes promoted aspects of rehabilitation and reintegration, such as a lack of empathy, remorse, a sense of dignity and social connectivity. The results of this study indicated that restorative justice had an impact

on offending behavior beyond just deterrence, in an interpersonal and emotional way (McCold, 2024; O'Connell, 2025).

While at the individual level, SJ was mainly a healing and rehabilitative process, there is evidence from 65.0 % of the reviewed studies that SJ is not solely an individual level process but is also aimed at social reintegration and community participation. Reintegration was a process that included repair of relationships, rebuilding community confidence, minimizing social marginalisation and those offenders being re-entered as positive citizens into society. In recent years, research has highlighted the importance of social reintegration as a component that has to be added in implementing restorative justice in Indonesia that must involve a multi-sector approach, especially involving the community and restoring social relationship (Amarini et al., 2024). They further highlighted evidence from South Africa that restorative justice may be more sustainable when the offender had a positive relationship with others in their community who were able to provide their rehabilitation, there was an increase in the feelings of belonging for offenders, there was remorse felt by the offenders and there was a decreased re-offending recorded (Mpofu et al., 2024). This was further substantiated by the results that 52.5% of the studies could be classified under relationship restoration and reconciliation. Reactive meetings, however, would only be one of the "pieces of the puzzle" in reintegration. Family support and employment opportunities, community acceptance, psychological support, and institutional cooperation were other key factors to successful reintegration. This meaningful position moved the discourse from restorative justice as the panacea for all such challenges arising after an offence, to thinking systemically where restorative justice would be one component in addressing the larger systemic challenges that weighed upon the issue. (Amarini et al., 2024; Ahmed et al., 2024).

The conclusions supported the main thesis that the emphasis within the justice system needs to be changed from punishment to recovery, accountability, rehabilitation, and social restoration and also help inform some of the elements that may affect the utilization of restorative justice. Evidence of ongoing research is evident in the number of provocation studies published in the last three years (2024–2026) which grew from 45.0% of the reviewed publications. Twenty-five percent (10/43) of the studies that indicated mixed results, encouraged that restorative justice cannot be considered a universal success. Recently it has been shown that relational alignment, emotional preparation of participants, their expectations in the programme, programme design and meaningmaking in restorative moments were influences in outcomes (Suzuki, 2026). Forgiveness was also studied, and it was emphasized that forgiveness does not necessarily involve the restoration process, which is the process of restoring the two parties (Suzuki and Jenkins 2024). Similarly, with sensitive offences there are still some problems requiring careful implementation, because the offence itself is sensitive and might have two or more possible outcomes based on the victim's safety and the ability of the victim and the perpetrator to willingly pursue the offence, as well as the mental preparation of the offender and the victim.

Conclusion

The study found that restorative justice had a wider and more humanity-based approach to the Justice because it didn't just look at punishment, but restoring the person behind the crime, the need to rehabilitate the offender, the need to hold the accountability of the offender and the need to reintegrate into society. The analysis of the 40 selected studies revealed that the victim recovery was the dimension most often studied (77.5%) followed by offender rehabilitation/offender accountability (72.5%) and social reintegration/community participation (65.0%). Additionally, 67.5% of the studies cited found overwhelmingly positive results supporting the positive potential of restorative practices in terms of positive impacts on the victim's experience, an increase in sense of responsibility for the offender, behavioural change and community relationships. The results also revealed that there were not consistent results overall across context; 25.0% of studies showed mixed, and/or context specific results to be found. To accomplish this successfully, a total engagement of victims, safeguarding of victims, skilled facilitation, effective offenders' accountability, community participation and continued rehabilitation support were crucial. The restorative justice thus became a hopeful way to articulate healing, justice and reparations, accountability, enabling a focus on the needs of the victim and on the needs of the community itself, rather than the needs of the offender, as the focus of justice.

Future Directions

Further research should be conducted in traditional research designs with more samples, longer time periods and mixed methods that will allow for the mapping of changes over longer periods of time in victims' recovery, offenders' rehabilitation, and social reintegration. Comparative research needs to be undertaken between countries, justice sectors, types of offences and across various demographic groups to find out what factors at the contextual level affect restorative outcomes. Greater efforts should also be devoted to assessing less readily evaluated, long-term outcomes like psychological responds, quality of social relationships, employment, community acceptance, behavioral change, and recidivism. Further research is required into the impact of a digital restorative practice, community based programmes, culturally responsive practices and restorative approaches with counselling and rehabilitation on outcomes. More work should be done on 'victim's' and 'offender's' experience of not initiating restorative processes to explore factors of safety, trust, stigma, power imbalance and emotional readiness. Additional research and demonstration of the enduring effects of effective RJ systems and when, can yield stronger evidence of successful models that can be integrated with traditional criminal justice systems and remain to serve the needs of victims, offenders, and their communities, and can enhance community and system safety and benefit.

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