

An Economic Evaluation of Restorative Justice: A Summary

Why me?

Transforming lives through
Restorative Justice



An Economic Evaluation of Restorative Justice

Why me? has conducted an economic evaluation comparing Restorative Justice interventions to the conventional justice system. The research analysed the economic impacts of Restorative Justice interventions, including its impacts on reoffending and direct benefits to victims.

The cost of crime

Reoffending rates are high; around a quarter of proven offenders reoffend within a year, committing an average of three to four offences each. Home Office research estimated that in 2016 the total economic and social costs of reoffending in this first year were £18 billion. Breaking the cycle of reoffending is crucial because it could reduce the huge costs incurred by the Criminal Justice System, and improve the lives of offenders and victims.

The model

This research focused on post-sentence Restorative Justice interventions for adults and young people in England and Wales. Restorative Justice was modelled as reducing reoffending for one year, based on existing estimates of how long the effects of a Restorative Justice intervention last.

In the model 8% of referrals to a Restorative Justice service resulted in direct Restorative Justice interventions (a face-to-face meeting), and 19% resulted in indirect Restorative Justice interventions (a two-way dialogue between victim and offender that is not face-to-face). The cost of the Restorative Justice pathway was £285 per referral and £3,394 per direct Restorative Justice intervention.

The results

We found that each direct Restorative Justice intervention reduced the average number of reoffences in the first year from 27 to 19. Overall, the cost-social benefit ratio of Restorative Justice was £14 per £1 invested. Of this, the direct return on investment for the criminal justice system was £4 per £1 invested. The additional benefits are related to the financial benefits and increased wellbeing for victims of crime and society.

The cost of delivering Restorative Justice, from referral to intervention, was the most important source of uncertainty. However, the cost-social benefit ratio remained substantial (£11 per £1), even when the cost of delivering Restorative Justice was increased by 50%. This demonstrates that the results were robust to uncertainty. It was not possible to robustly model the total expected benefits if access to Restorative Justice was increased nationally. Nevertheless, for illustrative purposes, an increase in Restorative Justice referrals for this cohort, from 15% of eligible cases to 40% of eligible cases would require a £5 million investment but would lead to total benefits of £76 million. The model suggests that this would save the criminal justice system £17 million.

This report makes a significant and comprehensive contribution to the Restorative Justice evidence base. Whilst the existing evidence reviewed in our research is substantial, there are a number of areas in which additional research is needed in order to advance policy makers' understanding of the value of Restorative Justice and how to harness this value to improve outcomes for victims, offenders and society as a whole. These areas are outlined as recommendations for future research in the report, and include improved data collection on the costs of delivering Restorative Justice services, enhanced measurement of wellbeing for victims and offenders, and diversification of crime types researched.

This research shows that Restorative Justice can reduce reoffending, save money and help victims to recover. This research adds to the strong evidence base which demonstrates that Restorative Justice is a worthwhile investment for the criminal justice system, and increasing access should be a policy priority for national and local decision makers.

Recommendations for future research

1. Improved national data collection should be a priority, based on a shared definition of key metrics, including level of investment, number of referrals, number of direct Restorative Justice interventions, number of indirect Restorative Justice interventions, reoffending rate, victim wellbeing and offender wellbeing.
2. Further research is needed to establish validated measures of victim and offender wellbeing.
3. Any updates to the Economic and Social Costs of Crime 2018 report, or other government research on the economic impact of crime, should include the impact of crime, and the subsequent justice process, on offenders.
4. Further research is needed to understand whether the spectrum of Restorative Justice interventions are associated with the same benefits.
5. The evidence base is not well developed in relation to some crimes for which Restorative Justice is becoming commonly used, such as sexual offences, domestic abuse and hate crime.

Recommendations for policymakers

This research synthesises, and adds to, the substantial evidence base demonstrating that increasing access to Restorative Justice interventions benefits victims, offenders, the state and society. Increasing access to Restorative Justice should be a policy priority within the criminal justice system. This can be achieved by implementing the following recommendations.

1. The right to be given information about and access to Restorative Justice should be enshrined within the primary legislation of the Victims Bill.

2. The Ministry of Justice should develop a monitoring and evaluation framework to improve access to Restorative Justice interventions across England and Wales.
3. The Victims' Commissioner should be given national oversight of reporting to hold the government, and other organisations, to account for delivering against their statutory duties in relation to Restorative Justice.
4. The Ministry of Justice should introduce a ringfenced Restorative Justice budget, separate from the Victims' Grant to Police and Crime Commissioners and mayoral areas.
5. A National Action Plan on Restorative Justice would improve national coordination and oversight of provision for victims and offenders. We recommend that the plan should be championed by a dedicated Minister.
6. It is strongly recommended that the Government, and research funding bodies, invest in research to further understand the social and economic impacts of Restorative Justice. This should align with the themes detailed in this report.

Recommendations for Police and Crime Commissioners

1. We recommend that you use the model produced by this research to understand the return on investment in Restorative Justice in your area.
2. Review your current spending on your local Restorative Justice service and seek to understand if the budget is sufficient to support facilitation of face-to-face interventions between victims and offenders of crimes post-sentence.
3. When commissioning external services, consider introducing a minimum of five-year contracts with the option to extend for your restorative service.

4. It is recommended that HMPPS implement a monitoring and evaluation framework for Restorative Justice across the secure estate and for probation services.
5. In the absence of a national evaluation framework for Restorative Justice, invest in local monitoring and evaluation systems.
6. Ensure compliance with Public Sector Equality Duty and Victim Code of Practice.
7. Engage with Why me?'s annual Valuing Victims reports and consider an annual review of the Why me? 10 PCC asks in order to monitor your progress on Restorative Justice.



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