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Abstract Information

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Systematic Review of Effects of Restorative Justice Conferencing on Victims and Repeat Offending

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Abstract:

Restorative justice over the past 25 years has been enthusiastically embraced by its advocates but viewed sceptically by its detractors. The process entails direct communication between offenders and their victims who discuss the offence itself, how they were affected and what should be done to repair the harm caused. It takes many forms but the method that we know most about involves face-to-face restorative justice 'conferencing' (RJC) in which offenders and victims, together with their families and friends acting as supporters, meet face-to-face in the presence of a trained facilitator. The research evidence on RJC, which is the subject of the Review, is now sufficient in volume and in quality to respond to the claims of its advocates and its detractors. It will also assist with important policy decisions to be made by governments about the future of this way of 'doing justice', whether as a diversion from criminal justice processing through the courts or as an addition to it. The evidence in the review consists entirely of randomised controlled trials with two principal outcome measures: frequency of re-arrest or re-conviction of offenders and levels of victim satisfaction. There are now 12 such trials completed and reported upon, all of them with measures of two-year post-treatment reoffending. Each was designed to test the effects of CRJ under different conditions including age of offenders (adult and juvenile), nature and seriousness of the offence, social setting for the intervention and point in the justice system (pre-sentence and post-sentence, including in prison). All involved randomly assigning eligible consenting offenders who had accepted responsibility for the offence either to normal criminal justice procedures or to CRJ: in five studies CRJ was used instead of normal criminal justice procedures and in the remaining seven it was used in addition to them.
