



Restorative Justice with Domestic Violence Offenders

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A novel domestic violence offender treatment has been shown to significantly decrease both the number of instances and severity of subsequent intimate partner violence. Improvements to domestic violence intervention services cannot come too soon. An estimated 1 in 3 women and 1 in 4 men in the United States have experienced physical violence at the hands of an intimate partner.¹



Figure 1 Image from Wikipedia. Public Domain

“Not only can [this treatment] reduce the incidence of new crimes, but it also reduces harm when new crimes do occur.”

Restorative Justice is a dialogue-based response to crime that aims to heal some of the emotional and spiritual damage from the crime. Restorative Justice has been used for a range of crimes, such as burglary and murder, and can include mediation, group conferencing, and/or sentencing circles involving offenders, victims, facilitators, and/or community members. In this study, restorative justice elements were combined with a traditional batterer intervention program into a new domestic violence offender treatment.

Highlights

The intervention significantly reduces future violence from known domestic offenders.

Findings are widely relevant for those with a stake in reducing interpersonal violence within and beyond our nation.

Methods

Domestic violence offenders (N=222) in Salt Lake City, Utah were randomly assigned into either a traditional batterer intervention program or a hybrid traditional-plus-restorative justice program. The sample included employed Caucasian males around 33-35 years of age with relatively short criminal records in the 24 months before the study. Traditional program participants completed 18 90-minute weekly treatment sessions. Hybrid program participants completed 12 traditional weekly sessions (as mandated by Utah law) followed by 6 90-minute restorative justice-based sessions.

HOW DID A COMMUNITY PSYCHOLOGY PERSPECTIVE INFORM YOUR WORK?

Restorative justice is a community-based response to crime. Facilitating dialogue between those who committed the crime and those the crime affected helps prepare both parties should they choose to coexist in the same community in the future.

Results

- The hybrid program resulted in a 53% reduction in the number of participants' new arrests over a 2-year period.
- The program also resulted in a 52% reduction in the severity of participants' new crimes over this period, as calculated based on the offense category from the Utah Adult Sentencing Guidelines' official grading system (e.g. misdemeanor, third degree felony, second degree felony, etc.).
- Both new arrests and severity of arrests decreased more following the new hybrid program than a traditional batterer intervention program.

What Does This Mean For?

Research and Evaluation: We build on existing findings indicating that restorative justice can be an effective response to a variety of crimes. There is potential for a new and improved response to domestic violence. Further research on this hybrid intervention is warranted.

Practice: This study offers court-mandated domestic violence offender treatment providers an alternative treatment that may surpass the effectiveness of traditional programs.

Social Policy: Criminal justice system policymakers should be attuned to future research in this area and update court-mandated treatment policies to direct offenders to the most effective treatment programs available. Funds can be channeled to support the institution of such programs.

¹ Black, M. C., Basile, K. C., Breiding, M. J., Smith, S. G., Walters, M. L., Merrick, M. T., ... Stevens, M. R. (2010). *The National Intimate Partner and Sexual Violence Survey: 2010 Summary Report* (pp. 2–2). Atlanta, GA: National Center for Injury Prevention and Control Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

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