

Restorative justice: The Need for Awareness Within the Law Enforcement Community

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Introduction

I did research on the current limitations encountered by restorative justice practices. While traditional justice focuses specifically on the offenders, restorative justice shows that there are other crucial parties involved in the commission of crime and these parties are critical to the success of restoration (Fox, 2014). I am interested in determining the current limitations of restorative justice in order to provide the reader with solutions/opportunities. The research question I studied is composed of the following two pieces:

- What are the current limitations faced by restorative justice programs and restorative justice practices?
- What are the opportunities and potential solutions for these limitations?

I decided to conduct this research in order to get a better understanding of the current issues encounter by restorative justice and provide opportunities/solutions to these issues. Most importantly, the objective of this research is to raise awareness among law enforcement practitioners. It is crucial for law enforcement practitioners to be aware of the limitations of restorative justice because they are the ones directly involved in the criminal justice system and those who can make a difference.

Background

Police officers, law enforcement officers and the community as a whole must know and understand the principles and objectives of restorative justice in order to apply it. Previous research studies have shown a critical lack of awareness coming from both the community and law enforcement practitioners (Laxminarayan, & Wolthuis, 2015). The analysis of current limitations faced by restorative justice is an important subject to research since restorative justice has been shown to have positive impacts on both the community and the different parties involved in the process. For instance, “a review of restorative justice conferencing using face to face meetings of offenders and victims showed that, on average, this approach can cause a modest but highly cost-effective reduction in repeat offending, with substantial benefits for victims.” (Plecas, 2014, p.13).

Methods

The articles selected for this research were chosen based on their relevant content and consistency regarding the research topic and themes (Image of Justice, Availability, Funding’s). More than 10,000 articles came out from the initial search. Inclusion and exclusion criteria’s were used to reduce the amount of hits. The number of articles was once again too high which is why “Full text” and “Scholarly Journals” were added to the search. Among the 313 articles that came out of the final search, 25 articles were selected for abstract review. Eight articles among the several articles selected for abstract review were selected for complete review. These articles provided the information required to determine the limitations of restorative justice along with different perspectives regarding the research topic. The data collected through this research has been analyzed with a comparative methodology. Secondary data coming from various articles has been analyzed in order to determine existing gaps and trends that were consistent and repetitive from one article to another. This method increases the reliability of the data since it provides trends that have been noticed from different perspectives, which, in turn, increases the probability of accuracy.

Results/Findings

In relation to the first piece of the research question, the purpose of which was to identify the current limitations of restorative justice programs and restorative justice practices, there are three different themes that stand out from the literature. The themes in question were the need to change the image of justice, the availability of restorative justice programs and restorative justice practices and finally the lack of funding. During analysis of the findings, I noticed that the limitations of restorative justice were all interrelated to each other and caused by the lack of awareness from the community, but most importantly, law enforcement practitioners. As mentioned by Malini Laxminarayan and Annemieke Wolthuis, “culture may change to become more restorative through greater awareness, cooperation and trust.” (Laxminarayan, & Wolthuis, 2015).

Discussion

While conducting my research, and reviewing the literature, I found a correlation between the lack of awareness regarding restorative justice and the current limitations faced by restorative justice. Throughout the literature, I noticed that the fact that people do not see restorative justice as a real punishment, makes it hard to fully integrate the criminal justice system and gain credibility. If law enforcement practitioners were aware of the process and were aware that restorative justice is not a “softer” but rather a “different” way to address criminal behaviours, restorative justice programs could gain support and credibility that would benefit the community. Fairly recent studies and surveys such as a crime survey for England and Wales, determined that “only 4.2% of victims of crime where the offender was known to the police recall being offered restorative justice.” (Collins, 2016, p.1) These numbers show an extremely low percentage of referrals and results showed that lack of awareness was the main cause of it.

Recommendations

Firstly, since there is no agreement regarding the definition of restorative justice practices, it will be fundamental for the criminal justice system to agree on a definition. Secondly, increase the involvement of the public in the restorative justice process. Finally, create partnerships with the community (e.g., local businesses).

Conclusions

After analyzing the literature, I determined that the limitations of restorative justice were, the need to change the image of restorative justice, the lack of availability of restorative justice and finally, the lack of funding. Information gathered among reports, researches and surveys provided me with information necessary for the determination of future opportunities and solutions that have been provided in the discussion and recommendations portion of this project. I decided to focus on increasing awareness among law enforcement practitioners because they are the one who have the power to apply restorative justice practices. Law enforcement practitioners are directly involved in the criminal justice system and have the potential to fully integrate restorative justice in the criminal justice system. Awareness is the key for the success of restorative justice and law enforcement practitioners must understand the benefits and impact of restorative justice on their community.

References

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