

Examining the Effectiveness of Restorative Justice

Final Report

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### **Abstract**

The Canadian criminal justice system is troubled by severe and systemic issues, ranging from over-incarceration, racism, recidivism, and effects of the criminalization of mental health issues (Perry, 2016). There have been countless pleas from the Canadian public for meaningful change. The Department of Justice (2015) proposed increasing the availability and use of restorative justice as a possible solution. Therefore, the purpose of this study is to gain a better understanding of the use of restorative justice as a potential solution to high recidivism rates. This study utilizes the mixed-methods approach and comprises both qualitative and quantitative secondary data. This research will highlight critical aspects vital to ensuring the effectiveness and success of the restorative justice process. This study shows that the use of restorative justice does produce a reduction in recidivism, especially for crimes that are more serious or personal in nature. Therefore, it is proposed that the increased use of restorative justice for more serious offences could offer a practical benefit to the reduction of serious offending and help create a safer Canadian society.

*Keywords:* restorative justice, offender, recidivism, reoffending, victim satisfaction, effect, and success.

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## **Background**

The criminal justice system in Canada is plagued with serious issues such as over-incarceration, recidivism, systemic racism, and the effects of the criminalization of mental illnesses (Perry, 2016). Unfortunately, those who suffer the most from these systemic issues are also most vulnerable and marginalized by mainstream Canadian society (Department of Justice Canada, 2019). The Canadian public has made countless pleas for changes to the Canadian criminal justice system to reduce recidivism, over-incarceration, improve social systems and increase awareness for mental health and addiction issues, to no avail. What if there is an alternative approach to the traditional criminal justice system in Canada? One that has existed since time immemorial but has been underutilized? That approach is restorative justice. The Department of Justice (2015) proposes to increase the availability and use of restorative justice (RJ) to assert meaningful change. Zehr (2003) defines restorative justice as “a process to involve, to the extent possible, those who have a stake in a specific offence to collectively identify and address harms, needs and obligations in order to heal and put things as right as possible” (p. 46). This study aims to determine if the use of restorative justice reduces recidivism, and if so, what factors contribute to the decrease.

Secondary literature published in, Australia, Canada, New Zealand, the United Kingdom, and the United States regarding the use of RJ practices was examined. RJ practices date back centuries; however, for this research project, data collection was limited to articles published between 1995 to 2020. The selection of RJ as the topic for this research project was due to personal interest in the effectiveness and satisfaction as the researcher pursues a career as a probation officer.

Therefore, this research paper's focus will be to learn more about the effectiveness of RJ and the potential benefits this approach can offer to victims, offenders and communities in relation to the reduction of reoffending. This research will follow the pragmatic approach to examine the systemic issues that plague the Canadian justice system to find practical solutions to these issues (Creswell, 2014). Using a mixed-methods approach allowed the researcher to utilize quantitative and qualitative data to understand the effects of restorative justice on recidivism rates.

### **Research Question**

The purpose of this project is to provide insight into possible solutions to the systemic problems that are plaguing the Canadian criminal justice system. This research was conducted using a pragmatic lens. A secondary literature review was completed to examine the systemic issues that plague the Canadian justice system to find practical solutions to reduce recidivism (Creswell, 2014). For the purpose of this research, the term effective will be operationally defined as resulting in a reduction in recidivism. This research project sought to answer the research question, is restorative justice effective at reducing recidivism, and if so, why?

### **Research Design and Methodology**

A secondary literature review of existing research regarding various aspects of restorative justice was conducted. The researcher selected research conducted in Australia, Canada, the United Kingdom, New Zealand, and the United States. The date range was limited to articles published between 1995 and 2020. Moreover, prior research by the researcher has found similarities and commonalities in research and practice in the countries mentioned above; therefore, they will be the focus of this research project. The purpose will be to better understand recidivism rates for offenders who have completed the RJ process. It also identifies the

characteristics that have the greatest effect on the overall satisfaction and perceived effectiveness of the process for all RJ participants, including offenders, victims, and any stakeholder to whom harm was done.

A mixed-methods approach was used to integrate both quantitative and qualitative data. The mixed-methods approach is relatively new in the world of research and is used in diverse fields such as sociology, health sciences, education and criminology. The use of mixed-methods allows the researcher to collect both closed-ended and open-ended data in response to the research question. It includes quantitative and qualitative data integrated into the design analysis by connecting the data to one other. As the mixed-methods approach allows combining two forms of data, potential limitations that could occur using a singular approach are reduced, strengthening the researchers' understanding of the research question (Creswell, 2014).

An explanatory sequential mixed-methods approach was used to collect quantitative data then collect qualitative data to explain the quantitative results in greater detail. In the first phase of research, quantitative data was collected from meta-analysis studies conducted by Bergseth & Bouffard (2013) and Sherman et al. (2015). To examine if the use of RJ did, in fact, have an effect on reducing recidivism rates. The next phase was completed by examining qualitative research studies and participant interviews conducted primarily by Umbreit et al. (2002); Paul & Swan (2018); and Armstrong (2012). This step was conducted as a follow up to explain the reasoning for the quantitative results. Thereby learning more about the effectiveness and success of RJ approaches and determining the overall satisfaction of the victim, offender, community, and any additional stakeholders to whom harm was done. For this design type, the timing of data collection is important. The researcher collects and analyses quantitative data then uses the results to plan or guide the second qualitative phase (Creswell, 2014, p. 266). This design type

was chosen purposely to ensure that the researcher could gather and analyze all forms of data available to best answer the research question.

This research was conducted using the pragmatic approach to examine the systemic issues plaguing the Canadian justice system and find real and practical solutions to improve the Canadian criminal justice system (Creswell, 2014). The pragmatic worldview's premise is to understand the consequences of actions in the real-world and determine practical solutions to real-world problems. The pragmatic approach was used as the researchers' goal was to better understand issues affecting recidivism in Canada and determine if the use of RJ can effectively reduce them.

### **Quantitative Data Collection**

The systemic review conducted by Sherman et al. (2015) included studies in Australia, the United States, and the United Kingdom. They began their review by examining 519 studies and applied a rigorous set of inclusion criteria, resulting in a complete review of 10 studies. They assessed the frequency of repeat offending of 1,880 offenders over a period of two years.

A meta-analysis conducted by Bergseth and Bouffard (2013) examined the effects of RJ programs for juvenile offenders. Their study compared 284 youth referred to the RJ process in the Midwestern United States and 267 youth referred to traditional juvenile court. Their study assessed whether the effectiveness of restorative justice had differential impacts at reducing recidivism for juvenile offenders across various offender characteristics such as age, race, gender, offence history and current offence type (p. 1055).

### **Quantitative Data Analysis**

Research by Sherman et al. (2015) found that 9 out of 10 experiments of RJ resulted in a decrease in offending and reported a reduction of repeat convictions or arrests between 7 and

45% (p. 11). Half of the experiments in the sample tested recidivism for violent crime, and the other half tested property crime. The effect size was larger with serious crimes and far less effective for property crime (p. 12). Although many public officials say that RJ is more appropriate for juvenile offenders Sherman et al. (2015) determined RJ was more effective at reducing reoffending in adults. Interestingly, they found that reoffending was less likely for personal offences.

Bergseth & Bouffard (2013) found a reduction in reoffending in each RJ program, with an average 8% reduction in reoffending in juveniles and adults (p. 1057). However, they determined that RJ programs were significantly more effective for adults than juveniles. Offence type affected reoffending, with violent offences having a considerably lower rate for reoffending over 12 months than property offences and drinking and driving-related offences (p. 1058). They found that the characteristics of age, race, gender and prior offence history had the most significant effects on recidivism.

### **Qualitative Data Collection**

Umbreit et al. (2002) reviewed 63 empirical studies across five countries studying the impact of restorative justice conferencing for victims, offenders and the community. They assessed client satisfaction, fairness, restitution, diversion, recidivism and cost concerning recidivism.

Paul & Swan (2018) surveyed goal importance, process effectiveness and overall support for victim-offender conferencing. Their study consisted of 210 participants who completed the survey, 62.3% of whom were men, three quarters were Caucasian, and the average age was 33.34 years. Participants of the study were from 38 states across the United States.



Armstrong (2012) conducted 35 semi-structured interviews to determine RJ participants' perceptions and expectations to provide an inside look at victims' experiences with the RJ process. The study's sample size was smaller than the researcher would have liked; however, the qualitative information gained by examining participants' perceptions, expectations and experiences were in much greater detail than other research available. Therefore, the researcher concluded that it was worth using a study with a small sample size.

### **Qualitative Data Analysis**

Umbreit et al. (2002) reported that RJ programs, on average, resulted in a reduction in reoffending. All participants reported high levels of satisfaction with the process. Offenders reported positive experiences, such as connecting with people and explaining their story, as this helped change their attitude going forward.

Paul & Swan (2018) found the most important aspects for offenders were learning new behaviours so they would not continue to commit crimes, demonstrating responsibility by apologizing and paying restitution. The most important factors for victims were closure and satisfaction (p. 153). Overall findings linked the perceived importance of interaction with individual and relational reintegration as key factors in reducing recidivism (p.154).

Armstrong (2012) conducted qualitative interviews that offered a more comprehensive understanding of the most important factors necessary for victims' satisfaction with the RJ process. This study yielded the most comprehensive findings regarding victim experiences with the RJ process. Moreover, Armstrong (2012) determined that the use of RJ for crimes of higher severity such as homicides or sex offences offered the greatest benefit to reducing recidivism.

### **Literature Review**

A comprehensive search of peer-reviewed journals, relevant academic books and government databases was completed. Key search terms were used to limit the search results to a manageable level. These key terms included restorative justice, offender, victim, recidivism rates, reoffending, effect, reduce, victim satisfaction, success, Australia, Canada, New Zealand, the United Kingdom, and the United States. The primary resources used to search articles were EBSCOhost, Google Scholar, and Google. Articles selected were based on the criteria including the reference of restorative justice practices in the following countries: Australia, Canada, New Zealand, the United Kingdom, and the United States as prior research has indicated similarities and commonalities in both research and practice of RJ in these countries. The search was limited to articles that were peer-reviewed and available in full text. Moreover, only articles published between 1995 and 2020 were selected to ensure the most relevant RJ approaches were examined. Exclusion criteria were eliminating research from countries not listed above, studies with a small sample size, articles published outside of the search range, and newspapers or non-academic articles.

Seventeen articles were selected for an abstract review. These articles were selected if their titles included key terms relevant to the topic of restorative justice, such as effectiveness, victim satisfaction, success and recidivism rates. Additionally, articles were only selected if a full abstract was available to ensure enough information was available to provide a full understanding of the paper's topic and themes to ensure relevance to the research question.

Of these seventeen articles, nine were then selected for a final review and analysis. The articles the researcher selected were for various reasons. First, abstracts were selected if they offered enough information to suggest the article was able to provide sufficient material to

answer the research question. Second, the organizational layout was examined to determine if detailed sections such as purpose, method, findings and conclusion were used, as the researcher has found that articles broken down into these sections greatly decrease the amount of time required to gain a sufficient understanding of the article's main points and assists in determining if the findings were relevant to the research, effectively assisting the researcher with time constraints. Third, article length was considered to ensure that adequate information could be obtained to answer the research question and to eliminate any articles that were too lengthy, further maximizing the researcher's time. After these factors were taken into account, it was determined that the nine articles selected should provide adequate information to answer the research question: is restorative justice effective at reducing recidivism, and if so, why?

## **Results**

Are Restorative Justice Conferences Effective in Reducing Repeat offending? Findings from a Campbell Systemic Review” by Sherman et al. (2015) examined recidivism rates of 1,880 offenders who participated in face-to-face restorative justice conferences. They found that highly emotional discussions regarding the harm caused by crime produced a greater effect on reducing recidivism (p. 20). Crimes that were more violent were associated with greater emotion than less violent offences like burglary, car break-ins and vandalism. Additionally, they found that RJ conferences effectively reduced recidivism and provided a cost-efficient method of reducing recidivism (p. 18).

“Examining the Effectiveness of a Restorative Justice Program for Various Types of Juvenile Offenders” (2013) by Bergseth & Bouffard highlights the importance of understanding if RJ programs targeting juvenile offenders have differential impacts on recidivism across different offender characteristics. Such as offender age, gender, race, offending history, and

offence type. The authors report consistent results across different characteristics, suggesting that RJ may be appropriate for use with a broader range of participants and for more serious crimes.

“Reflections on the Past, Present and Future of Restorative Justice in Canada” by Tomporowski et al. (2011) discuss the history of RJ practices in Canada. They present challenges that affect restorative justice, such as a lack of funding, a serious lack of comprehensive data collection and questions regarding RJ’s suitability for offences that produce a greater chance of revictimization, such as when a power imbalance is present. They call for more research in this area as well as increased training and risk assessment to ease concerns of revictimization (p. 826).

“Factors Contributing to Victims’ Satisfaction with Restorative Justice Practice: A Qualitative Examination by Armstrong (2012) explains the need for a qualitative review to explore victims’ perceptions, expectations and experiences with the RJ process. Semi-structured interviews were discussed and provide an inside look at the victims’ experience of RJ. Factors necessary for victims’ satisfaction such as feeling prepared, the ability to be involved and interact with their offender, as well as the ability to receive an explanation and an apology were also discussed.

“The Impact of Restorative Justice Conferencing: A Review of 63 Empirical Studies in 5 Countries” by Umbreit et al. (2002) explains the RJ approaches of victim-offender mediation (MOD), family group conferencing, and peacemaking circles. Factors such as client satisfaction, fairness, restitution, diversion, recidivism, cost, effectiveness and satisfaction of the restorative justice process were examined in depth. Issues such as conceptional and definition ambiguity, net widening, and expected outcomes versus realistic expectations were also assessed.

“Receptivity to Restorative Justice: A Survey of Goal Importance, Process Effectiveness, and Support for Victim-Offender Conferencing by Paul & Swan (2018) assessed public attitudes regarding the outcomes and practices of both the traditional justice system and RJ.

Victim/offender outcomes and victim/offender interactions are detailed. The primary goal was to determine the outcome of both the traditional and RJ process and the perceived effectiveness.

Paul & Swan (2018) suggested that the RJ process is less likely to cause lasting revictimization as the process promotes relationship restoration, empowerment and closure, unlike the traditional criminal justice system. Additionally, they suggest that positive accountability is much more effective at reducing recidivism than negative punishment, as its goal is to repair the harm (p. 147).

“Conferencing in the Youth Criminal Justice Act of Canada: Policy Developments in British Columbia by Hackler (2005) identifies changes in restorative justice conferencing practices introduced in British Columbia with the enactment of the Youth Criminal Justice Act of 2003. The author reported concerns with net widening as a consistent challenge for the use of RJ. Research indicates that using RJ for minor offences, especially for youth, can result in more youth either under supervision or officially charged.

After completing a comprehensive review of the literature, several themes were identified. The use of RJ effectively reduces recidivism rates, overall satisfaction is higher compared to the traditional justice process, victim involvement is vital, and challenges of net widening must be addressed.

### **Effectiveness of Reducing Recidivism**

A prominent theme that emerged was that recidivism rates were consistently lower for offenders who went through the RJ process compared to those who participated in the traditional

justice process (Sherman et al., 2015). Although RJ is still used more frequently for offences involving youth or minor offences such as property crimes, it is becoming more widely used for all types of crimes. There has been a recent trend toward using RJ for more serious offences such as homicide, domestic assault and sexual offences (Tompson et al., 2011). Research conducted by Bergseth & Bouffard (2013) asserts that when RJ is used for more serious crimes, lower recidivism rates are reported compared to minor offences such as property or Driving Under the Influence (DUI) offences. Studies show that when the offender can see firsthand that their actions caused harm to another person, it significantly reduces offending (Bergseth & Bouffard, 2013). Furthermore, in the reduced chance that reoffending did occur, it was more often for a less serious crime (Sherman et al., 2015).

### **Overall Satisfaction is Higher for RJ**

Several factors contribute to the satisfaction and perceived success of the RJ process. Research by Armstrong (2012) details that what matters most for victims is their ability to be involved equally in the process of RJ. Victims report that the manner in which RJ is conducted safeguards victims and helps to ensure they feel prepared to face and interact with their offender (Paul & Swan, 2018). Ensuring they are adequately prepared is vital, as contributing factors to satisfaction are asking questions, getting answers and receiving apologies. These aspects cannot happen if the victim is not ready (Paul & Swan, 2018).

Offenders claim the most important aspects necessary to ensure feelings of satisfaction are the ability to connect with people, the opportunity to pay back the victim and community, having the ability to make amends, and not surprisingly, offenders stated avoiding court was an important factor. Additionally, offenders reported the process helped change their attitudes towards committing offences (Umbreit et al., 2002).

Members of the community claim that understanding the root causes of crime and having a role in restoring relationships are most important for perceived satisfaction (Tomprowski et al., 2011). Lastly, Paul and Swan (2018) report that participants felt that the RJ process was safer, fairer and more appropriate than the traditional criminal justice process (p. 157).

### **Victim Involvement**

One of RJ's most essential aspects is victim involvement, as victim participation is vital to ensuring offenders can go through the RJ process. Therefore, an examination of victim involvement deserves greater attention than previous research has provided. Victims report one of the most common reasons for going through the RJ process is their ability to be more involved in the justice process (Armstrong, 2012). Victim involvement in the traditional justice system is severely limited and provides little more than the ability to write a victim impact statement and present it to the court. The RJ process offers victims much greater participation (Armstrong, 2012). Victim involvement is a principal point of the RJ process and victim's report that their ability to be involved in the RJ process allows them to feel in control and empowered (Paul & Swan, 2018). These feelings indicate that participation is a significant factor in high rates of satisfaction and feelings of closure (Armstrong, 2012). Higher satisfaction levels may result in more victims of serious crimes consenting to take part in the RJ process. Research indicates that this could result in the increased use of RJ for more serious offences and potentially offer a beneficial impact on the likelihood of reoffending for serious crimes (Sherman et al., 2015).

### **Net Widening**

The last key theme found was the challenge of net widening, which was addressed throughout the majority of articles examined. "Net widening," otherwise known as "widening the net," is the process that can occur due to administrative or practical changes that result in an

increase in the number of people who are controlled in some way by the criminal justice system (Leone, 2002). Net widening appeared to be a consistent challenge with using RJ, particularly regarding youth, and minor crimes, as the majority of articles examined report that RJ practices are most often used for youth or minor offences. Research completed by Bergseth and Bouffard (2013) indicated that of the 284 youth cases of RJ they examined, 84% were referred for misdemeanour offences. The most common were property offences, such as vandalism (p. 1063). However, researchers suggest that using RJ for minor offences as a means of diverting youth from the traditional justice process might be widening the net and resulting in more youth either under supervision or officially charged. This is a challenge that must be addressed, through increased training and policy changes, to ensure the use of RJ as a diversion does not result in increased involvement in the criminal justice system. Addressing this challenge is especially important for youth and for those who commit minor crimes that would typically go uncharged if the traditional justice process was used (Hackler, 2004; Tomporowski et al., 2011).

All of the themes mentioned above represent key characteristics that are vital for the RJ process to be effective. These themes highlight the key components necessary for the RJ process to successfully reduce recidivism and provide all stakeholders with the highest perceived feelings of satisfaction and closure, thereby increasing the effectiveness of the RJ process.

### **Discussion**

Studies revealed that the use of RJ resulted in a reduction of reoffending, predominantly for crimes that were more serious or personal in nature. Interestingly, RJ conferences, which produced a greater emotional response, had a more significant effect on recidivism (Sherman et al., 2015). One plausible explanation for these findings is that when the offender can see firsthand that their actions caused harm to another person, it significantly reduces offending, as it



increases their feelings of remorse and empathy towards others (Bergseth & Bouffard, 2013). Furthermore, if reoffending did occur, it was most often for a less serious offence.

RJ advocates Paul and Swan (2018) report that using negative accountability through various forms of punishment is much less effective at reducing recidivism than positive accountability by taking responsibility for your actions and providing an apology. The experience of taking personal accountability is said to provide the offender with a greater opportunity to learn and grow in a more constructive way, and this change in attitude and way of thinking results in a reduction of recidivism (p. 147).

Keys to satisfaction for victims were feeling prepared, ready to face and interact with the offender, having the ability to ask questions, finally getting answers, and receiving an apology. As for offenders, the ability to connect with people, learn and change their behaviours, have a chance to pay back victims, and avoid court was the most important. Members of the community reported that understanding the root causes of crime and having a role in the restoration process was key to their satisfaction (Armstrong, 2012).

Victims identified the most common reason for involvement is their increased ability to participate in the process compared to the traditional justice process. Victims reported that increased participation enabled them to feel in control and empowered, contributing to higher feelings of satisfaction and closure, which increased their willingness to participate (Armstrong, 2012). Net widening was reported to be a consistent challenge for the use of RJ, as research indicated that using RJ for minor offences, especially for youth, can result in more youth either under supervision or officially charged. Thankfully, researchers believe that this can be adequately addressed through increased training and policy changes (Hackler, 2004).

Few RJ studies have examined the impact of individual characteristics of the offender on the RJ process, such as age, race, gender, socioeconomic status, criminal history or more dynamic characteristics such as antisocial behaviour. Although Bergseth & Bouffard (2013) found that RJ has a better effect on reducing recidivism for adults, they reported some interesting findings related to youth. They stated that youth who lived in high poverty areas experienced significantly lower recidivism levels after completing the RJ process than the youth of similar income levels who completed traditional diversion programs (p. 1060). Additionally, they found that RJ worked significantly better for girls than for boys (p. 1061). This research suggests that RJ is appropriate for a broader range of participants.

### **Recommendations**

After completing this study, it is recommended that further research is needed regarding the use of RJ with serious or personal offences and cases involving power imbalances to determine the suitability of this approach. The implementation and increased use of risk analysis tools are needed to reduce the chances of revictimization. Additional research is needed regarding the potential impact that offender characteristics, such as gender, age, race, culture, socioeconomic status and dynamic personality characteristics may play in the effectiveness of RJ. Increased funding is critical to ensure that all necessary resources are available for the increased use of RJ for all consenting Canadians. Moreover, it is recommended that criminal justice system officials should be required to inform offenders and victims of crime about the availability of restorative justice options.

### **Limitations**

Due to the scope of this research study, the ability to address a number of subsequent questions was limited. Such as examining the suitability of RJ for crimes involving a power

imbalance in greater detail as well as exploring offenders' socioeconomic status in relation to recidivism. Consideration and analysis of the effectiveness of each specific RJ approach were limited and requires further research. Additionally, the availability of RJ practices is limited, as the use of RJ is typically only permitted upon request (Office of the Federal Ombudsman for Victims of Crime, 2017). Furthermore, comprehensive qualitative research is limited and requires more investigation. Lastly, caution must be used when generalizing findings and comparing the results of RJ in different countries, justice systems, and cultures.

### **Ethical issues**

As the studies examined vary across numerous countries and included thousands of participants with varying demographic variables, external validity should be supported. Some potential ethical issues with this research include confirmation bias on behalf of the researcher, this issue was addressed by including any potential challenges to RJ's effectiveness and success within the current study. Additional concerns regarding participant consent and the potential issue of self-selection bias with offenders and victims must also be addressed. As offenders who are willing to participate may already be less likely to re-offend; therefore, caution must be used. Furthermore, several prominent authors appear to dominate the research and are mentioned in several studies, meaning caution towards researcher bias must be urged. Moreover, it is vital to ensure that all participants give proper consent to participate in the RJ process.

### **Conclusion**

Examining the effectiveness of restorative justice at reducing recidivism has revealed that the use of RJ is effective at reducing recidivism. Some common characteristics that contribute to reducing recidivism were found, overall satisfaction is higher with RJ than the traditional justice system for the offender, victim and the community, and victim involvement is vital in the RJ

process to be successful. Interestingly, RJ conferences that produce a greater emotional response are said to provide the greatest reduction in recidivism, perhaps explaining why recidivism is reduced more consistently when RJ is used with more serious or personal crimes. In addition to these factors that aid in reducing reoffending, several concerns were also found, such as net widening, revictimization, and questions regarding the suitability of RJ for more serious offences or one that involves a power imbalance.

This research project's significance is that it underlines the need for change in the Canadian criminal justice system and the need to create a fair, efficient, and compassionate justice system, that can meet the needs and expectations of all Canadians. The Department of Justice Report (2019) proposed that increased use and availability of RJ could assist with these much-needed changes. It is suggested that the increased use and availability of RJ could provide practical solutions to some of the most serious issues the Canadian criminal justice system is facing.

Based on this current research, there is the potential for RJ to have a meaningful impact on recidivism rates; this is especially true for crimes that are more serious such as sex offences or homicides, as victims of these offences are the most likely to experience revictimization and lasting trauma (Armstrong, 2012; Tomporowski et al., 2011). If the increased use of RJ results in a reduction in the occurrence of the most serious offences, this would positively impact the Canadian criminal justice system and provide some welcome relief to a justice system that is currently heavily over-burdened and underfunded (The Department of Justice Report, 2019). Furthermore, any reduction in reoffending of serious crime would create safer communities and safer Canada as a whole.

More research is needed to determine if increasing the use and availability of RJ will result in the increased use of RJ for more serious crimes. However, it is proposed that if this happens, reoffending rates will be lower and could relieve some of the burdens on the traditional court system (Sherman et al., 2015). More conclusive research is needed to determine the suitability for RJ with cases that are severe, extremely personal in nature, or involve a power imbalance and whether they should be dealt with through a restorative lens rather than a punitive one. Additionally, increased public education is necessary to ensure that all members of Canadian society know their rights regarding the availability of RJ.

The purpose of this research was to examine the effectiveness of restorative justice at reducing recidivism rates, to determine if the increased use and availability of RJ could offer a practical solution to one of the many serious issues plaguing the Canadian criminal justice system. Although reducing recidivism is only one aspect of the problems affecting the Canadian criminal justice system, it can have a potentially positive impact on other issues afflicting the justice system. By providing pragmatic solutions to reduce reoffending, more time and resources can be allocated to improving other issues such as over-incarceration, systemic racism and the effects of the criminalization of mental illness. Improving these issues can alleviate some of the burdens on the Canadian justice system and help improve the lives of those most vulnerable and marginalized by mainstream society.

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