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Research Field

Restorative Justice

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LAWS 4003 – Research
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Examining the effectiveness of restorative justice

Research Problem & Rationale for Study

Recidivism is a systemic issue plaguing the Canadian criminal justice system. Therefore, the purpose of this study was to gain a better understanding of existing literature regarding the effectiveness of restorative justice (RJ) on recidivism. A mixed-methods study was conducted to determine what factors influence the effectiveness and success of the RJ process. This research study sought to answer the research question: is restorative justice effective at reducing recidivism rates, and if so, how?

Methods

An explanatory sequential mixed-methods approach was used to examine secondary literature. Quantitative data was collected from studies regarding recidivism rates for RJ participants. Qualitative data was then collected to explain the recidivism results in greater detail. The primary resources used to find articles were EBSCO, Google, and Google Scholar databases. The search was limited to peer-reviewed articles, available in full text, and published between 1995 and 2020.

Results

The results of this study indicate the use of RJ resulted in the reduction of reoffending. RJ conferences that produced a higher emotional response had a greater effect on recidivism. Consequently, RJ was shown to be more effective at reducing recidivism for more serious crimes and less effective at reducing recidivism when used with youth or for minor crimes, such as property/theft-related offences.

Conclusions

After completing this mixed-methods literature review, it was determined that the use of RJ is effective at reducing recidivism rates. Especially for crimes that are more serious or personal and for which the RJ conference resulted in a highly emotional conversation. Further research is needed to determine the suitability of RJ in cases that are severe, extremely personal or involve a power imbalance.

Structured Abstract

Introduction:

The purpose of this study was to gain a better understanding of existing literature regarding the effectiveness of restorative justice (RJ). The intention of this research project was to provide an informative report in the field of law enforcement and public safety underlining the need for change in the Canadian criminal justice system. This research study sought to answer the research question: is restorative justice effective at reducing recidivism rates, and if so, how?

Methods:

An explanatory sequential mixed-methods approach was used to examine secondary literature. A search of peer-reviewed journals, academic books and government databases was completed. The primary resources used to find articles were EBSCO, Google, and Google Scholar databases.

Results

After reviewing the literature, it became evident that the use of RJ resulted in the reduction of reoffending. Specifically, RJ was more effective at reducing recidivism for more serious crimes and less effective at reducing recidivism when used with youth or minor crimes. RJ participants reported greater feelings of satisfaction than those who went through the traditional justice system process.

Discussion:

This research highlights some of the current issues affecting the Canadian criminal justice system and suggests solutions to these systemic problems. Identifying practical solutions allows us to move one step closer to implementing changes to create a fair, efficient, and compassionate justice system.

Practical Applications:

The increased use and availability of RJ would provide a practical solution to one of the many serious issues plaguing the Canadian criminal justice system. Although recidivism is only one of the many problems affecting the Canadian criminal justice system, lower recidivism rates could have a 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, and the effects of the criminalization of mental illness. Improving these issues can

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alleviate some of the pressure on the overburdened criminal justice system and help improve the lives of those most vulnerable and marginalized by mainstream society.

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