

**The Impact of Restorative
Justice Programmes on
Reducing Recidivism
Rates in Multi-Agency
Anti-Corruption Efforts**

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Abstract

This study examines the effectiveness of restorative justice as an alternative approach to traditional punitive measures in handling corruption cases. While punitive approaches emphasise deterrence through imprisonment and fines, restorative justice focuses on accountability, reparation, and reintegration. The study is grounded in Restorative Justice Theory, which emphasises repairing harm and fostering offenders' accountability. Using a qualitative research methodology, the study analyses case studies, policy evaluations, and expert interviews to assess the implementation and impact of restorative justice in corruption cases. Thematic analysis is applied to identify patterns in asset recovery, voluntary disclosures, and public trust in anti-corruption institutions. Findings indicate that restorative justice can enhance transparency, increase asset recovery

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rates, and encourage whistleblowing. However, challenges such as political interference, legal constraints, and public perceptions of leniency hinder its effectiveness. The study concludes that while restorative justice is not a standalone solution, it serves as a valuable complement to punitive measures. Strengthening legal frameworks and institutional safeguards can enhance its role in anti-corruption efforts, making justice systems more inclusive and effective.

Keywords: Restorative Justice, Corruption, Punitive Measures, Asset Recovery, Accountability

Introduction

Corruption is a global issue that undermines governance, erodes public trust, and hinders economic growth (Transparency International, 2023). Traditional anti-corruption strategies often emphasise punitive measures, such as imprisonment and fines, which aim to deter offenders and set an example for others. However, such approaches have proven inadequate in addressing the systemic drivers of corruption or reducing recidivism rates (Braithwaite, 2020). This limitation has prompted the exploration of alternative approaches, such as restorative justice, to complement traditional mechanisms. Restorative justice is a victim-centred approach that focuses on repairing the harm caused by criminal behaviour, holding offenders accountable, and involving all stakeholders, including victims, offenders, and the community in the resolution process (Zehr, 2019). In the context of corruption, restorative justice seeks to rehabilitate offenders and reintegrate them into society, while promoting transparency and accountability. Latimer et al. (2021) opined that restorative justice can reduce reoffending rates by addressing the psychological and social factors that contribute to criminal behaviour. They indicate that offenders who participate in restorative justice programmes are less likely to engage in repeat offences because they develop a deeper understanding of the harm they have caused and are given an opportunity to make amends. Moreover, restorative justice fosters collaborative problem-solving by involving all stakeholders in developing solutions to prevent future corruption. This can lead to institutional reforms,

improved ethical standards, and stronger mechanisms for monitoring and reporting corrupt activities.

In multi-agency anti-corruption efforts, which involve the collaboration of various institutions such as law enforcement, anti-corruption commissions, and civil society organisations, restorative justice can enhance effectiveness. By promoting dialogue and coordination among stakeholders, restorative justice programmes can help build trust and mitigate the challenges of fragmented anti-corruption frameworks (Meijer, 2021). Despite its potential, the application of restorative justice in anti-corruption efforts remains underexplored, especially in contexts with high corruption rates and limited institutional capacity.

Theoretical Frameworks

Restorative Justice Theory underpins the concept of restorative justice, emphasising the repair of harm caused by criminal or unethical behaviour through collaborative processes involving the offender, victim, and community. Rooted in indigenous justice practices and reinforced by contemporary criminological frameworks, restorative theory challenges traditional punitive approaches by focusing on accountability, reconciliation, and the reintegration of offenders into society. Restorative theory views crime or misconduct not just as a violation of laws but as a breach of relationships. The primary focus is on addressing the harm caused to individuals and communities and restoring those relationships to a state of balance. Unlike punitive justice, which emphasises punishment, restorative theory advocates for offender's accountability through active participation in acknowledging harm, making amends, and committing to behavioural change. The community plays a pivotal role in restorative processes. The theory recognises that crime affects broader social networks and seeks to involve community members in dialogue, support, and the reintegration of offenders. Central to restorative theory is the idea of healing for victims, offenders, and communities. It aims to empower victims by giving them a voice, reduce recidivism by addressing the underlying causes of behaviour, and foster a sense of closure and justice.

Empirical Evidence on Restorative Justice and Recidivism

Despite the proliferation of restorative justice programmes, Braithwaite (2020) suggests that their effectiveness depends on various factors such as the programme type and methodological quality of the studies. The goal of this study is to synthesise the research on the effects of restorative justice in reducing recidivism as well as improving other outcomes for male and female adult clients. Information from 27 studies examining 34 unique samples was included in the meta-analysis. California Policy Lab. (2024) provided empirical evidence supporting the effectiveness of restorative justice programmes in reducing recidivism. A notable example is the “Make-it-Right” (MIR) programme in San Francisco, which targets youths, aged 13 to 17, facing felony charges. Participants in the MIR programme engage in restorative justice conferencing, emphasising accountability and harm repair. An evaluation of this programme revealed a 44% reduction in the probability of rearrest within six months for participants compared to a control group undergoing standard criminal prosecution. Similarly, a meta-analysis by Fulham and Blais (2023) synthesised data from 27 studies encompassing 34 unique samples to assess the impact of restorative justice programmes on recidivism. The analysis concluded that restorative justice interventions are associated with significant reductions in reoffending rates, though the magnitude of the effect varies based on the programme type and implementation quality.

Multi-Agency Approaches in Anti-Corruption Efforts

Combating corruption often necessitates a multi-agency approach, leveraging the strengths and resources of various institutions. A study focusing on Kenya’s anti-corruption framework examined the effectiveness of such collaborative strategies. The research highlighted that while multi-agency collaborations can enhance resource sharing and strategic alignment, they also face challenges such as role duplication, limited powers, and the need for comprehensive legal frameworks to define collaboration levels. The study recommended developing a comprehensive legal framework outlining the level of collaboration among anti-corruption bodies to deal with duplication of roles and limited powers. Joint trainings should be conducted to align their skills so they can jointly fight against corruption effectively, and the

legal framework should be enhanced to allow the anti-corruption institutions to fully exercise their mandate devoid of political interference (Njogu & Mwenda, 2023).

Integrating Restorative Justice into Anti-Corruption Initiatives

The integration of restorative justice principles into anti-corruption efforts is an emerging area of interest. While direct studies on this integration are limited, the theoretical underpinnings suggest potential benefits. Restorative justice emphasises accountability, harm repair, and stakeholder engagement, which can complement traditional punitive measures in addressing corruption. By involving offenders, victims, and the community in dialogue, restorative approaches can address the root causes of corrupt behaviour and promote rehabilitation. Implementing restorative justice within multi-agency anti-corruption frameworks presents several challenges. Coordination among agencies with differing mandates and cultures can lead to operational inefficiencies. Additionally, there may be resistance to adopting restorative approaches due to entrenched preferences for punitive measures. Ensuring that restorative justice programmes are appropriately designed and implemented is crucial, as variations in programme principles and techniques can impact their effectiveness. (Meijer, 2021).

Impact of Restorative Justice on Recidivism among Corruption Offenders

The study's findings indicate that restorative justice programmes significantly reduce recidivism rates among corruption offenders within multi-agency anti-corruption frameworks. Analysis of qualitative data from interviews, focus group discussions, and document reviews highlights that offender who participated in restorative justice programmes demonstrated lower tendencies to reoffend compared to those subjected solely to punitive measures. Participants reported that the process of victim-offender mediation and structured reconciliation sessions increased their awareness of the harm caused by their actions and motivated behavioural change. Additionally, victims and community stakeholders expressed higher levels of satisfaction with restorative justice outcomes, as the approach allowed for direct accountability and amends-making, rather than reliance on impersonal legal proceedings.

Findings also reveal that multi-agency collaboration improves the effectiveness of restorative justice programmes by facilitating offender rehabilitation and strengthening mechanisms for monitoring post-intervention behaviour. Agencies that incorporated restorative justice practices into their frameworks experienced improved case resolution efficiency, as offenders were more cooperative during the process. Moreover, agencies working together were able to share resources and expertise, creating a more comprehensive anti-corruption strategy. However, the study also identifies several challenges hindering the full adoption of restorative justice in anti-corruption efforts. Participants noted institutional resistance, particularly from agencies with strong punitive orientations, as well as legal and policy gaps that make it difficult to systematically integrate restorative justice into existing anti-corruption frameworks. Other key obstacles include jurisdictional conflicts between agencies, political interference, and public scepticism regarding the effectiveness of non-punitive measures in addressing corruption.

Effectiveness of Restorative Justice in Reducing Corruption Recidivism

The findings of this study align with existing research, demonstrating that restorative justice programmes contribute significantly to reducing recidivism rates among corruption offenders. The results show that offenders who participated in restorative justice interventions exhibited lower tendencies to reoffend, largely due to their involvement in victim-offender mediation, accountability dialogues, and community reintegration processes. These findings support the argument made by the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), which asserts that restorative justice approaches promote offender rehabilitation, reduce reoffending rates, and foster reconciliation between offenders and victims (UNODC, 2020). UNODC emphasises that the success of restorative justice programmes depends on their integration within broader rehabilitation frameworks, ensuring that offenders receive appropriate support in addressing the root causes of their criminal behaviour. Agencies that integrated restorative justice within their anti-corruption frameworks reported improved case resolution efficiency, as offenders were more willing to cooperate and acknowledge responsibility

when engaged in restorative processes. This observation aligns with findings from a study conducted in Indonesia, which examined the potential of restorative justice as an alternative approach in combating corruption offenses (Suhartono et al., 2023). The study found that while restorative justice can be an effective tool in addressing corruption, challenges such as identifying victims, ensuring restitution, and obtaining stakeholder buy-in remain major obstacles to its full implementation (Suhartono et al., 2023).

Challenges and Benefits of Restorative Justice in Addressing Corruption

Additionally, the study's findings indicate that restorative justice programmes have a positive impact on offender accountability and moral reform. Many offenders reported that their participation in restorative justice sessions helped them understand the social and economic harm caused by their actions, leading to a stronger commitment to ethical behaviour. This finding is consistent with the results of a meta-analysis examining restorative justice and recidivism, which concluded that restorative justice interventions effectively reduce both the frequency and severity of reoffending among high-risk offenders (Strang et al., 2013). The meta-analysis emphasised that these programmes are particularly effective when tailored to the specific needs of offenders, incorporating mechanisms such as structured mediation, victim involvement, and rehabilitative support systems (Strang et al., 2013). The study's results reinforce this conclusion, demonstrating that corruption offenders who participated in structured restorative justice programmes were less likely to engage in repeat offences compared to those subjected to traditional punitive measures.

Despite these positive outcomes, the study also identifies several systemic barriers to the successful implementation of restorative justice in anti-corruption efforts. One major challenge is institutional resistance from agencies that traditionally rely on punitive measures to address corruption. Many law enforcement and anti-corruption officials remain sceptical about the effectiveness of restorative justice, arguing that corruption offences require stricter punitive consequences rather than rehabilitative interventions. This resistance is compounded by jurisdictional conflicts, as different agencies often have overlapping mandates, leading to inconsistencies in the

implementation of restorative justice programmes. A similar challenge was noted in Kenya's anti-corruption framework, where researchers found that multi-agency collaborations faced obstacles such as role duplication, limited enforcement powers, and political interference (Njogu & Mwenda, 2023).

Another key barrier identified in the study is public scepticism and cultural resistance to restorative justice approaches. Many societies, particularly those with high corruption rates, view punitive measures as the most effective deterrence against corruption offences. As a result, restorative justice is often perceived as a lenient or ineffective approach to handling corruption-related crimes. This perception limits public and institutional support for restorative programmes, making it difficult to secure funding, resources, and legislative backing. To address this issue, experts recommend public awareness campaigns and educational initiatives that highlight the benefits of restorative justice in addressing the root causes of corruption and promoting long-term behavioural change among offenders (UNODC, 2020).

Conclusion

The study confirms that restorative justice programmes significantly reduce recidivism rates among corruption offenders by emphasising accountability, rehabilitation, and stakeholder engagement. The findings indicate that offenders who participated in restorative justice interventions demonstrated lower tendencies to reoffend, largely due to their involvement in victim-offender mediation, structured accountability processes, and community reintegration. These results align with previous research, such as Strang et al. (2013), which found that restorative justice programmes effectively decrease both the frequency and severity of reoffending when implemented with appropriate frameworks.

To address these challenges and maximise the impact of restorative justice, policy reforms, capacity-building initiatives, and public engagement efforts are necessary. Governments and anti-corruption agencies must establish clear legal mandates that integrate restorative justice into existing anti-corruption strategies, ensuring consistency and long-term sustainability. Additionally, public awareness campaigns should be launched to educate citizens and policymakers on the benefits of restorative justice in addressing corruption and reducing recidivism.

Policy Recommendations and Future Considerations

To enhance the effectiveness of restorative justice programmes in anti-corruption efforts, this study suggests the following:

- i. **Strengthening Legal Frameworks:** Governments should establish clear policies and legal mandates that support the integration of restorative justice into anti-corruption strategies. These frameworks should outline guidelines for victim-offender mediation, restitution mechanisms, and inter-agency collaboration to ensure consistency in implementation (Suhartono et al., 2023).
- ii. **Building Institutional Capacity:** Anti-corruption agencies should invest in training programmes to equip personnel with the necessary skills to facilitate restorative justice processes effectively. This includes training law enforcement officers, mediators, and legal practitioners on the principles and benefits of restorative justice (Njogu & Mwenda, 2023).
- iii. **Public Awareness and Stakeholders' Engagement:** Increasing public knowledge about restorative justice through media campaigns, community workshops, and policy dialogues can help shift societal perceptions and foster greater acceptance of restorative justice as a viable anti-corruption tool (UNODC, 2020).
- iv. **Monitoring and Evaluation Mechanisms:** Establishing independent oversight bodies to assess the impact of restorative justice programmes on recidivism rates will ensure transparency and accountability in implementation. Periodic evaluations should be conducted to identify areas for improvement and adapt programmes based on empirical findings (Strang et al., 2013).

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