CHAPTER 15

VICTIM ISSUES AND RESTORATIVE JUSTICE
THE ISSUE

Restorative justice is a set of concepts, values, and practices that emphasizes repairing the harm caused by criminal behavior, and requires examining and addressing the rights and responsibilities of victims, offenders, and the community. It applies to individual cases, and more broadly, in the planning and implementation of policies and programs, as well as the allocation of funds. These rights and responsibilities are best addressed through cooperative processes that include all stakeholders in the criminal justice system.

Victim recovery and repairing the harm caused by crime are both cornerstones of restorative justice. The approach has been proven to enhance victim healing and promote healthier communities, while simultaneously holding offenders accountable, encouraging them to repair the harm they caused, and improving chances of their positive reintegration into the community. The federal government should continue to create policies and provide sufficient and fair funding mechanisms for effective practices of restorative justice, victim assistance, and victim compensation.

HISTORY OF THE PROBLEM

Restorative justice provides a better alternative to purely punitive responses to crime, which the high recidivism rate suggests are deficient. Additionally, victims and affected members of the community continually voice concerns that the criminal justice system fail to show them respect, validate their experiences of trauma and loss, or address their needs for safety, reparation, and accountability. Some victims and community members also feel excluded when they do not

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2 Id.
3 “A restorative justice process maximizes the input and participation of [victims, offenders, and the affected community] -- but especially primary victims as well as offenders -- in the search for restoration, healing, responsibility and prevention.” Id.
4 Leena Kurki, Incorporating Restorative and Community Justice Into American Sentencing and Corrections, Sentencing & Corrections: Issues for the 21st Century, Sep. 1999, at 1 (noting that “because crime harms the victim and the community, the primary goals [of restorative justice] should be to repair the harm and heal the victim and the community”).
6 In a [2002] 15 State study, over two-thirds of released prisoners were rearrested within three years. See Bureau of Justice Statistics, Recentry Trends in the United States: Recidivism, http://bjs.ojp.usdoj.gov/content/reentry/recidivism.cfm (last visited Jan. 25, 2011).
7 In response to their alienation from the criminal justice system, victims have sought greater input and participation into the criminal proceedings, as well as recognition of the harm they have suffered personally. See, e.g., ELLEN ALEXANDER & JANICE HARRIS LORD, IMPACT STATEMENTS -- A VICTIM'S RIGHT TO SPEAK... A NATION'S RESPONSIBILITY TO
have a say in determining the proper response to a crime that affects them, despite the existence of constitutional and/or statutory victim rights requirements [which afford them that right] in every state.\(^8\)

The failure to incorporate victims’ perspectives in the criminal justice system has negative practical effects. Victims may become unwilling to report crimes or participate in the criminal justice system, making convictions more difficult.\(^9\) When victims do participate, they may feel frustrated by the lengthy processes of the traditional system, evidentiary rules that do not permit them to ask questions, and the lack of compliance with restitution orders.

1. **Overview of Restorative Justice**

   In 1997, Drs. Howard Zehr and Harry Mika developed the following “markers” that form the foundation of the restorative justice paradigm:

   - Focus on the harm of wrongdoing more than the rules that have been broken;
   - Show equal concern and commitment to victims and offenders, involving both in the process of justice;
   - Work towards restoration of victims, empowering them and responding to their needs as they see them;
   - Support offenders while encouraging them to understand, accept, and carry out their obligations;
   - Recognize that while obligations may be difficult for offenders, they should not be intended as harms and they should be achievable;
   - Provide opportunities for direct and indirect dialogue between victims and offenders as appropriate;
   - Involve and empower the affected community through the justice process and increase its capacity to recognize and respond to community bases of crime;
   - Encourage collaboration and reintegration rather than coercion and isolation;

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\(^9\) *Id.*

A major deterrent to reporting the crime is the victims' concerns about their treatment by the criminal justice system stemming from a belief that the system was 1) powerless to help them, and 2) might further victimize them. *See Id.*
Give attention to the unintended consequences of our actions and programs;

Show respect to all parties including victims, offenders, and justice colleagues.\textsuperscript{10}

Research has demonstrated that restorative justice approaches can reduce recidivism, cut costs, and improve victims’ satisfaction with the system more effectively than punitive measures.\textsuperscript{11} Drs. Lawrence Sherman and Heather Strang, internationally known criminologists from the Jerry Lee Center of Criminology at the University of Pennsylvania, reviewed research conducted in the United States, the United Kingdom, and Australia regarding restorative justice approaches. After reviewing 36 direct comparisons of restorative justice to conventional criminal justice practices, they found that restorative justice approaches were proven to have:

- Substantially reduced repeat offending for certain offenders;
- Reduced recidivism \textit{more than} prison (for adults) or detention (for youth);
- Reduced crime victims’ post-traumatic stress symptoms and related costs;
- Provided both victims and offenders with more satisfaction than the traditional approach;
- Reduced crime victims’ desire for violent revenge against their offenders;
- Doubled (or more) the offenses that could be addressed through the restorative justice model, thus diverting them from the traditional criminal justice system; and
- Reduced costs when used as diversion from the traditional justice system.\textsuperscript{12}

Indeed, where victims and affected community members have a say in the appropriate punishment and manner in which the offender repairs the harm, the offender is both more likely to comply, and less likely to commit another crime.\textsuperscript{13} Moreover, diverting cases out of the traditional judicial system and into restorative processes may ease the caseload on over-burdened courts.\textsuperscript{14} Yet, despite its proven effectiveness, many providers of restorative practices are losing funding. Although the DOJ paid some attention to restorative justice in the past -- providing funding for

\textsuperscript{10} Umbreit, et al. at 259 (citing Howard Zehr & Harry Mika, \textit{Fundamental Concepts of Restorative Justice}, 1CONTEMP. JUST. REV. 47, 54-55 (1998)).

\textsuperscript{11} “RJ has been tried and tested, and it works. It is good for victims, offenders and communities. The evidence base for RJ is stronger than for that of almost any other criminal justice intervention.” Lucian J. Hudson, \textit{Restorative Justice: The Case for Wider Adoption} (Dec. 2010)

\textsuperscript{12} Sherman & Strang, \textit{supra} note 5, at 4.

\textsuperscript{13} Sherman & Strang, \textit{supra} note 5, at 58-59, 68-71.

research on promising practices, seed money for start-up programs, and for some training and technical assistance -- little support has been provided over the past decade. Little to nothing has been done by the Bureau of Prisons to consider incorporation of restorative approaches. It is time for the U.S. to explore systemic change based on restorative principles and values and to promote evidence-based practices from the restorative justice model.

Restorative justice seeks to expand the characterization of a “case” within the criminal justice system from one that focuses solely on the appropriate punishment for an offender to one that also focuses on the victim and the community. In accordance with this approach, the case process under the restorative model would involve: (i) determining the harm (assessment); (ii) determining how to repair the harm (case plan); and (iii) determining who is responsible for repairing the harm (assigning roles and responsibilities).  

Examples of restorative justice practices include victim-offender dialogue and “community circles of support,” 16 These practices, which would be voluntary for victims, would help to serve victims’ needs, regardless of judicial outcome or correctional decisions. To be effective, these practices should be available as early as possible to victims and offenders, and continue to be available throughout the judicial process, from the first point of police contact through court proceedings and reentry. Through these restorative encounters, whether face-to-face meetings guided by trained facilitators, or meetings conducted via intermediaries, victims would have an opportunity to get answers about the crime and the person who committed it, as well as to get their material and emotional needs met.

The restorative justice case model also provides offenders with an opportunity to take responsibility for the harms they caused. Offenders learn the impact of their actions on others. They take an active role in correcting the wrongs they caused by, for example apologizing to the victim or community, performing community service, and/or providing material restitution. Offenders can participate in these activities even when victims choose not to participate.

The Department of Justice (DOJ) has paid attention to restorative justice in the past – providing funding for research on promising practices and seed money for start-up programs, training, and technical assistance, but has provided negligible support over the past decade. The Bureau of Prisons (BOP) has done little to nothing to consider incorporating restorative approaches. It is time for the U.S. to explore systemic change based on restorative principles.

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15 (“The conventional criminal justice system focuses upon three questions: (1) What laws have been broken?; (2) Who did it?; and (3) What do they deserve? From a restorative justice perspective, an entirely different set of questions are asked: (1) Who has been hurt?; (2) What are their needs?; and (3) Whose obligations are these?”) Id. at 258.

16 See Id. at 269 (discussing the types of restorative justice dialogue).
Congress has also acted in the area of restorative justice. In the Victim and Witness Protection Act of 1982 (VWPA), Congress authorized courts to routinely impose restitution as part of sentencing for any crime arising under Title 18. In determining the amount of restitution to impose, VWPA requires courts to consider the loss sustained by the victim, the defendant’s financial resources, and the financial needs and earning ability of the defendant and his or her dependents.

Congress later enacted the Mandatory Victims Restitution Act of 1996 (MVRA), making restitution mandatory for crimes of violence and most property crimes, regardless of the defendant’s ability to pay. As the vast majority of federal defendants are indigent, and therefore much of federal restitution is uncollectible, growth in unpaid criminal restitution debts resulted from MVRA’s enactment.

During the 110th Congress, Senator Byron Dorgan (D-ND) and Rep. Steve Chabot (R-OH) introduced legislation that sought to extend mandatory restitution to all federal crimes, which would have made the situation even worse. The Senate bill passed, although the Senate Judiciary Committee did not consider or hold hearings on the bill. The House bill did not pass, but the House Judiciary Subcommittee on Crime, Terrorism and Homeland Security held a hearing on the legislation in April 2008.

Congress has taken steps to assist victims of crime through state and local programs. In 1984, as part of the Victims of Crime Act (VOCA), Congress created the Victims of Crime Fund. The VOCA fund provides money for state and federal victim assistance and compensation programs and is made up mostly of money collected from penalties, fees, and fines that have been paid by federal criminals. The VOCA fund contains no taxpayer dollars. Both VOCA state victim assistance grants (which support direct victim services including rape crisis centers, domestic violence shelters, and counseling) and the VOCA compensation grants (which provide financial reimbursement to victims

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21 DOYLE, supra note 18, at 11.
24 Turley, supra note 22.
of violent crime for certain out-of-pocket medical and mental health expenses) are provided to all 50 states and the District of Columbia.27

Because the VOCA fund is comprised of money collected from penalties, fees, and fines, amount of the fund fluctuates from year to year. In 2000, Congress capped the amount of money that could be removed from the fund each year in order to ensure that money would be available for victims in the future.28 While a cap is appropriate for the local programs receiving the assistance funds to maintain stability and have ability to plan from year to year, the cap must be reasonable and not a reduction from previous years. Yet, in 2006, VOCA assistance grants began to be cut, resulting in the reduction of services to victims.29 In 2009, Congress raised the VOCA cap and, with the addition of Recovery Act funds, raised state assistance grants back to the 2006 level.30

The President’s proposed FY 2011 Budget included a $95 million increase for the VOCA cap over the FY 2010 level ($705 million), raising the VOCA cap to $800 million, and the Senate Consolidated Appropriations Act, 2011 contained an increase to $820 million.31 However, as of the January 2011, Congress has not enacted new spending bills for FY 2011; the Senate failed to consider the Consolidated Appropriations Act, 2011, and instead Congress passed a Continuing Resolution to keep the government funded through March 2011.32

The following questions can help to shape and analyze policies and practices to ensure that they fit within the restorative justice paradigm:

- Do they help identify and acknowledge the harm experienced by victims and communities?
- Do they help victims and communities in their healing in ways which empower the direct participants and provide needed support?
- Do they push offenders to develop the competencies necessary to understand and repair the harm they committed and to successfully reintegrate into their communities?
- Do they assist offenders in acknowledging and recovering from their own victimizations, which may have contributed to their committing harm to others?

28 Id.
30 Id.
• Do they recognize and address differences (e.g., cultural and gender) in the development of practices and programs by being sensitive to these to maximize the response?

• Do they assist both governmental entities and, more importantly, communities in promoting positive behavior, individual responsibility and collective responsibility?

• Do they promote and support community connections and strengths?

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. National Task Force on Restorative Justice

   A. Insufficient Focus on Restorative Justice Processes, Despite their Proven Efficacy

   Despite the proven efficacy of restorative justice processes, to date, education and funding have been inadequate to promote its development.

   B. Establish and fund a National Commission on Restorative Justice

   Legislative

   Congress should establish and fund a National Commission on Restorative Justice, akin to the National Prison Rape Elimination Commission. This Commission should perform a national study to examine the restorative justice paradigm. This study should explore the effectiveness of restorative justice in serving the needs of victims and communities, supporting offender accountability and competency, and ensuring the protection of constitutional rights. Using the results of the study, the Commission could recommend how best to incorporate restorative justice options into the responses of law enforcement, courts, probation officers, correctional institutions, and parole boards.

   Executive

   Absent congressional action, the President should establish a Task Force on Restorative Justice within the DOJ Office of Justice Programs. DOJ has been supportive of the development of restorative justice programming in the past and is in a good position to take the lead on the issue. The DOJ Task Force should develop a research agenda and explore the creation of a national strategy and action plan directed at supporting and expanding restorative approaches and systemic change on the local, state, and federal levels. A portion of DOJ funding should be dedicated to

targeted research efforts to test the effectiveness of restorative justice for victims of different types of crimes and from different kinds of communities.

2. **Restitution and Support for Victims of Crime and Use of VOCA Funds for Restorative Justice Activities**

   **A. Insufficient Funding to Provide Necessary Services**

   Providing restitution and support for victims of crime requires funding. Existing federal funding sources must be modified in order to operate more efficiently and effectively, and other funding streams must be developed. Further, current regulations regarding the use of VOCA funds for restorative justice efforts are unclear and confusing, and the regulations governing VOCA are not consistent in regards to restorative justice activities.

   **B. Expand Funding Streams for Victims of Crime**

   **Legislative**

   Congress should improve the likelihood of victims actually receiving restitution by creating a “Restitution Fund” and expanding judicial discretion in restitution orders. Congress should hold hearings and fully consider the issue before passing such legislation. Congress’s proposed mandatory requirement for restitution under the Dorgan and Chabot bills would have denied virtually all discretion for judges in fashioning equitable and case-specific sentences involving restitution. The imposition of orders which have little to no chance of fulfillment due to a defendant’s lack of assets and limited earning power simply provides another source of frustration—both for victims and the professionals responsible for enforcement.

   To address the problem of unpaid victim restitution, Congress should instead pass legislation creating a separate “Restitution Fund” which would receive any restitution payments that cannot be delivered to or received by the actual victims. This should be separate from the Crime Victims Fund, in order to allow for withdrawal of paid-in funds if victims are located at a later time.

   Congress should also remove the requirement of “mandatory restitution” for crimes and restore judicial discretion to order restitution. While it is reasonable for judges to acknowledge the actual damages victims suffered in open court and in the case file, judges should be granted the discretion to order a reasonable amount and a workable (and modifiable) payment schedule based upon a determination of the defendant’s income and other financial resources, reasonable living expenses, and responsibility for support of legal dependents. Payment of restitution should be prioritized ahead of court-ordered fines, services, and other court-system-imposed costs. In the

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34 S.973 and H.R. 845(110th Cong.), supra note 23.
case of multiple unidentified victims, or where the cost of locating the victims far exceeds the dollar amount due per person, the court should be allowed to fashion an order using the restitution dollars in creative ways that benefit crime victims, repair the harm that was caused, or prevent future harm. Civil consumer class action awards provide models.

Further, Congress should change current federal law regarding mandatory restitution, which currently prohibits victims and defendants from “settling” mandatory restitution orders, i.e., reaching a settlement regarding the amount or manner of payment even when done voluntarily and without coercion on either side.\(^\text{35}\) Settlements could increase the likelihood of victims actually receiving at least a portion of the restitution owed to them. The settlement process could be overseen by, or require the approval of, a federal magistrate.

Congress should also pass legislation stipulating that failure to fulfill court orders for restitution during periods of probation or parole due to the defendant’s proven limited ability or inability to pay is not a probation or parole violation. Extending or violating probation or parole based on an inability to pay may forestall or limit defendants’ ability to pay in the future, thus lessening victims’ chances of receiving restitution.

In budgeting federal funding for the remainder of FY 2011, the 112th Congress should ensure VOCA caps are high enough to provide services to victims budget for a VOCA cap that increases spending levels from FY 2010 to ensure that victims will receive the services that they need. According to the National Association of VOCA Assistance Administrators, a 2011 cap of $867 million would be adequate to “ensure a modest growth in state victim assistance grants.”\(^\text{36}\)

Congress should also ensure that forfeiture funds are used for victim restitution. Currently, items retrieved in forfeiture actions and the proceeds of their sale are kept by law enforcement. Congress should require that all proceeds from the sale of property forfeited under federal law be deposited in the VOCA Fund, or, preferably, in a separate Restitution Fund (as described above). Alternatively, Congress could set a cap on the amount of forfeiture proceeds that law enforcement could keep and require that the remainder be deposited into such a fund. That would not only enable many more victims to actually receive at least some portion of court-ordered restitution, it also would take away the pecuniary incentive that law enforcement now has to seek forfeitures.\(^\text{37}\)

Congress should also clarify that restitution takes priority over forfeitures, so that the government would not be able to trump victims’ claims by interposing a forfeiture claim that “relates back” to the time when the offense was committed. Many legal scholars believe that Congress has already done so in 18 U.S.C. 3572(b), but DOJ has consistently disputed that view,

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\(^{35}\) DOYLE, supra note 18, at 35.


\(^{37}\) See Asset Forfeitures. SMART ON CRIME (2011).
claiming that the words “other monetary penalty” does not include criminal forfeitures, even when the forfeiture is in the form of a money judgment against the defendant.

**Executive**

The Department of Justice should amend VOCA guidelines in several ways. The state agencies responsible for managing allocation of VOCA victim assistance grant funds operate under the 1996 *Guidelines on Victim Assistance* (Guidelines) from the Office for Victims of Crime (OVC) of DOJ. OVC should amend and clarify the following guidelines to ensure that the goals of VOCA are being met.

OVC should amend Guideline Section IV.C.1.h., on Restorative Justice, which contains the following prohibition: “VOCA assistance funds cannot be used for victim-offender meetings which serve to replace criminal justice proceedings.”\(^{38}\) This has been interpreted to prohibit funds to go to restorative conferences, i.e., facilitated victim-offender meetings, in certain cases. This guideline should be amended so that restorative conferences are allowed in lieu of criminal proceedings.

OVC should amend Guideline Section IV.E.3.b, which provides that “VOCA funds cannot support services to incarcerated individuals, even when the service pertains to the victimization of that individual.”\(^{39}\) To encourage states to serve incarcerated persons who are also victims, the sentence in the Guidelines prohibiting services to incarcerated persons should be eliminated, allowing these victims to benefit from VOCA funding.\(^ {40}\)

OVC should clarify the allowable use of VOCA funds for restorative justice services. OVC response to public comment on these guides describes corrections-based restorative practices, such as victim-offender dialogue and victim impact panels as permissible,\(^ {41}\) but Guidelines Section IV(C)(1)(h) states that VOCA funds “cannot support services to incarcerated individuals...”. It is not possible to provide services to victims in the context of meeting with their own perpetrator (dialogue) or with a group of different prisoners (panel) without “serving” offenders—the fact that the activity benefits prisoners as well as victims is a natural byproduct.\(^ {42}\)

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\(^{39}\) *Id.* Guidelines § IV(E)(3)(b).

\(^{40}\) *See Prison Reform*, SMART ON CRIME (2011) for recommendations for Congress to provide sufficient appropriations for PREA. To the extent appropriations under PREA are insufficient to meet the demand for serving currently incarcerated victims, Congress should increase the VOCA cap to make available new funds for services to incarcerated persons who are victims of violent crime under the VOCA funding scheme.


\(^{42}\) If necessary, Congress should also add any necessary language to authorizations to permit VOCA funds to be used for assisting victims in restorative justice practices used in place of conventional court proceedings and in corrections-based victim services in which offenders may also benefit.
DOJ should also establish within its existing OVC an advisory committee to analyze and respond to Congressional proposals for VOCA caps, as well as advise OVC and Congress on appropriate cap levels.
APPENDICES

Experts

Restorative Justice

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Crime Victim Restitution & Services

Steve Derene, Executive Director, National Association of Victim Assistance Administrators (http://www.navaa.org/)

Dan Eddy, Executive Director, National Association of Victim Compensation Boards (http://www.nacvcb.org/index.asp?sid=2)

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Further Resources


Prison Fellowship International (http://www.prisonfellowship.org/)

Justice Fellowship (http://www.justicefellowship.org/)

Just Detention International (http://justdetention.org/)
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