



Restorative Justice

The most valuable tool the Criminal Justice System does not use

In June 2008, the Ministry of Justice released the fourth and final report into the Home Office Crime Reduction Restorative Justice Trials.ⁱ

A total of 342 cases where a face-to-face meeting took place between offenders, victims and their supporters were examined using Randomised Control Trials - the gold standard in research methodology. The report included additional findings focussing on cases with no face-to-face meeting, smaller sample sizes and less rigorous research methodology which are not considered in this briefing.

The report was undertaken as part of the Government's RJ Strategy published in 2003ⁱⁱ and researched the impact of RJ on adult offenders and their victims when run alongside the Criminal Justice System.

Key findings include:

- Restorative Justice reduced the frequency of reconviction on average by 27% - by 33% when delivered to prisoners just prior to release; and by 55% when delivered to prisoners serving community sentences.ⁱⁱⁱ
- For every £1 spent on delivering the Restorative Justice conferences, up to £9 was saved in lowering the cost of offending, the trials alone saved the Criminal Justice System £7.29m compared to the £5m they cost to set up and evaluate.^{iv}

In June 2007 the third report in this series, focussing on participant satisfaction,^v showed:

- More than half of victims wanted to participate in Restorative Justice.
- 85% of victims and 80% of offenders were satisfied with their experience of the Restorative Justice conference with 78% of victims and 74% of offenders saying they would recommend it to others.
- Victims taking part in RJ benefit from increased emotional well-being, reduced stress and a faster return to work.

Overall, the results of this series of Ministry of Justice reports have proven that:

- The majority of victims of crime want to take part in RJ
- Both Victims and Offenders benefit from RJ
- RJ reduces the reoffending of Offenders who participate
- Delivering RJ saves the Criminal Justice System money

Restorative Justice is now one of the most rigorously researched Criminal Justice interventions and has demonstrated substantial victim benefits – the Ministry of Justice research highlights reductions in re-offending and extensive cost-savings that would result from widening the use of RJ.

The published aims and objectives of NOMS include reducing re-offending, rehabilitation of offenders and ensuring victims feel justice has been done. The Government's own research now shows that Restorative Justice fulfils all of these objectives and also saves the Criminal Justice System money

The Ministry of Justice response to the research has been surprising: Ministers have stated that the findings are inconclusive as most of the trial results are not "statistically significant" – meaning that the odds of the results being caused by chance are greater than one in two thousand or 0.05% - and that there is no evidence that RJ reduces the severity of offences, however:

Statistically significant results include:

- **Trials in Northumbria recorded statistically significant reductions in the frequency of reoffending and the severity of re-convictions.^{vi}**
- **Jointly, all Randomised Control Trials showed statistically significant reductions in both the frequency and the cost of re-offending after RJ.^{vii}**

Overall the report suggests that RJ does not effect the *severity* of offending. However when considering the combined effect of frequency and severity through examining the *cost* of re-offending the report finds that RJ delivers statistically significant reductions. Government emphasis on the importance of reducing severity over frequency and cost implies the Ministry of Justice would prefer to reduce ten serious crimes to seven serious crimes and two minor offences rather than ten serious crimes to five. Ultimately RJ results in fewer victims of crime by reducing the number of future offences.

Statistical significance is rightly used by Ministry of Justice as the gold standard for assessing the reliability of research results. When used to assess results such as human behaviour a very large sample size is required, however – typically over ten thousand. This is because behaviour is influenced by an extremely wide and complicated array of factors. As these trials consist of just over three hundred cases they were not expected to be statistically significant. Given this, the surprise is that some of the results **are**.

The RJC calls on the Government to respond to the evidence of their research and the wishes of both victims and offenders:

Seize this opportunity to develop RJ and strengthen the Criminal Justice System

We call on the Government to:

- **Recognise the evidence for RJ, provided by their own research**
- **Set up 5 model projects to show RJ in action**
- **Allow thousands more victims of crime the opportunity to benefit from Restorative Justice**

For further information on the above, or RJ in general, please contact the Restorative Justice Consortium
www.restorativejustice.org.uk
E info@restorativejustice.org.uk T 020 7653 1992
Albert Buildings, 49 Queen Victoria Street, London EC4N 4SA

ⁱ **Shapland, J et al (2008)** *Restorative Justice: Does Restorative Justice affect reconviction. The fourth report from the evaluation of three schemes.* Ministry of Justice Research Series 10/08. London: Ministry of Justice

ⁱⁱⁱ *ibid* at page 28, table 2.3 ^{iv} *ibid* at page 64, table 4.8 ^{vi} *ibid* at page 30, table 2.4 ^{vii} *ibid* at page 31, table 2.5

ⁱⁱ The Government's RJ Strategy is available at www.restorativejustice.org.uk/Resources/pdf/restorativestrategy.pdf

^v **Shapland, J et al (2007)** *Restorative Justice: the views of victims. The third report from the evaluation of three schemes.* Ministry of Justice Research Series 3/07. London: Ministry of Justice