Restorative Justice

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Published in Deckert, A. and Sarre, R. (eds.) The Palgrave Handbook of Australian and New Zealand Criminology, Crime and Justice, Chapter 26, p.393-406, ISBN: 978-319-55746-5

Abstract

With a focus on the emergence, development, and use of restorative justice (RJ) in Australia and New Zealand, this chapter provides an overview of the types of RJ practices used, their history and implementation in youth and criminal justice systems, and their role in contemporary justice practices. Consideration is also given to major research conducted on the use of RJ in Australia and New Zealand related to RJ goals of victim redress, offender accountability and reintegration, and community involvement in RJ processes. Future directions for research and practice are also provided.

What most people call restorative justice (RJ) today emerged in the late 1970s and 1980s out of a disparate and diverse set of critiques of and alternatives to traditional criminal justice practices in Australia, Canada, New Zealand, and the USA. There is a tendency to coalesce the development and growth of RJ into a single narrative. Its emergence was in fact decidedly less so. Rather, differing types of alternative justice practices were developed in different contexts and countries for different reasons, sharing less a single philosophy or even knowledge of other emerging practices than a shared focus on victim needs and lack of participation in the criminal justice system (Zehr 1990), problems with offender accountability and redress for victims of crime (Eglash 1977), and lack of community involvement or participation in criminal justice practices (Christie 1977).

Indeed, while New Zealand is often set forth in the literature as the first country to implement RJ systemically, none of the architects of the *Children, Young Persons, and Their Families Act 1989* (CYPFTA) had ever heard of RJ when they included Family Group Conferencing (FGC) as part of this Act (Doolan 2003). Rather, FGC was only part of a larger diversionary framework of the CYPFTA, such that its influence and notability as a ‘restorative justice’ paradigm was only retrospectively understood.

The history of RJ in New Zealand and Australia is far less concise and coherent as is often presented in the literature. In this chapter, we first look at some of the basic aspects of the emergence of RJ in these countries. Following these, we turn our attention to providing a current snapshot of RJ as it is used today in New Zealand and in different Australian states. We then consider some of the major studies conducted on RJ practices in Australia and New Zealand in relation to the RJ goals of victim redress, offender accountability, reintegration, and community involvement. Finally, we conclude with discussion of possible future directions for research and practice in RJ in Australia and New Zealand.

Emergence and development of restorative justice in New Zealand

In the 1980s, New Zealand experienced increasing rates of youth delinquency and incarceration, particularly among Māori youth. The CYPFTA was enacted to address these challenges and brought a number of new programmes into the New Zealand youth justice system. One of these programmes was FGC. In their initial inception, FGCs were not designed—as often claimed—to introduce the use of RJ into the youth justice system (Bradley, Tauri, and Walters 2006). Rather, the development and implementation of FGC was two-fold. It was intended to be used as a diversionary intervention for offenders in the youth justice system, as well as a care and protection strategy to be used in the child welfare system (MacRae and Zehr 2004).

In its use for youth offenders, FGC involves a face-to-face meeting that includes the victim, the offender, a trained facilitator, a police officer, and other possible participants such as victim's and offender's family members or supporters, or community members (Van Ness, Morris, and Maxwell 2001). Participants are first given opportunities to tell their own stories about the offence and to express their feelings about what has happened. Subsequently, participants discuss what the offender should do to repair the harm caused by the offence, and compose an outcome plan which may include a verbal or written apology, restitution, community service, working for victims, counselling et cetera (Van Ness, Morris, and Maxwell 2001).

The FGC process for youth offending in New Zealand was, and remains, designed to work within a larger diversionary youth justice framework. Such a recognition does not detract from the importance of FGC in youth justice, but it is also not correct—as many have argued—to say that New Zealand's youth justice system is based on RJ. Becroft (2009) notes that data from 2006, for example, found that for the approximately 30,000 youth offences in that year, only about 6 percent were subject to intention-to-charge FGC, with another 20

percent referred to Youth Court for possible referral to FGC. The large majority of youth cases received cautions or diversion.

In New Zealand, implementation and use of conferencing for adult offenders has also developed significantly since the mid-1990s (NZ Ministry of Justice 2010). In 1995, three pilot schemes funded by the New Zealand government were implemented to divert adult offenders from courts through the use of restorative community panels (Bowen, Boyack, and Calder-Watson 2012). Following on these pilot programmes, the use of RJ for adult offenders was expanded through legislation, including the *Sentencing Act 2002*, the *Parole Act 2002*, and the *Victims' Rights Act 2002* (NZ Ministry of Justice 2004). While RJ for adult offenders in New Zealand remains marginal compared to that for young offenders, RJ for adult offenders is, as of 2016, implemented in three stages of the New Zealand criminal justice system: pre-trial, pre-sentence and post-sentence (Hughes 2016).

Emergence and development of restorative justice in Australia

Following the inception of FGC in New Zealand, RJ youth conferencing was introduced in Wagga Wagga, NSW in 1991. Daly (2001) notes that, while the changes in the New Zealand youth justice system were influential in the initial adoption of conferencing in Australia, the manner in which conferencing was adopted differed in several ways from that found in New Zealand. FGC in New Zealand was endorsed both at the top-down level, for example, by officials and professional workers, and at the bottom-up level for example by some Māori advocates. In Australia, however, RJ was initiated at “the mid-level administrators and professionals (including police)” (Daly 2001, 61–62). As such, unlike New Zealand where FGC was introduced as one of the diversionary strategies to reform the youth justice system,

in Australia conferencing was introduced as a community policing and police cautioning strategy (Moore, Forsythe, and O'Connell 1995).

The differences between the models were more than administrative. First, as Daly and Hayes (2001) note, given the focus on community policing and cautioning, the Wagga Wagga model is facilitated by a police officer. Second, the development of the Wagga Wagga model drew more explicitly upon the theory of reintegrative shaming put forward by John Braithwaite (1989).

Following the first implementation of conferencing in NSW, conferencing steadily evolved across other jurisdictions in Australia. SA was the first Australian jurisdiction that legislated conferencing for youth offenders in 1994. Subsequently, all Australian jurisdictions have legislated conferencing for youth offenders; WA in 1995, QLD in 1997, NSW in 1998; NT in 1999; TAS in 2000, ACT in 2005, and VIC in 2005 (Joudo-Larsen 2014).

As such, conferencing has become the dominant form of RJ in Australia. However, while the Wagga Wagga model was the first model of conferencing in Australia, it has not become the norm. Rather, most Australian jurisdictions introduced variations of the New Zealand model of conferencing (Daly 2001). Also, even though conferencing in Australia is mainly used as a diversionary strategy, there are jurisdictional differences in terms of its implementation, including offence types eligible for conferencing (Joudo-Larsen 2014) and length of time to complete the outcome plan (Daly and Marchetti 2012).

In contrast to New Zealand, Australia has shown a slower development in the application of RJ for adult offenders (Bolitho, Bruce, and Mason 2012; Halsey, Goldsmith, and Bamford 2015). For example, while conferencing has been informally implemented or piloted for adult offenders in some jurisdictions (Strang 2001), conferencing for adult offenders was, as of 2014, only available in four jurisdictions, that is NSW, VIC, SA, and QLD (Joudo-Larsen 2014).

Research on restorative justice in Australia and New Zealand

The period of the last two decades has seen a significant growth in empirical research on RJ in Western countries, and Australia and New Zealand are no exception. Indeed, given RJ's relatively wide implementation and institutionalisation in Australia and New Zealand, these countries have produced a significant amount of research on the effects of RJ on victim redress, on offender accountability and reintegration, and on community involvement in RJ practices.

Victim redress

As a consequence of crime, victims experience a variety of problems and needs. Victimology literature shows that one important need for victims is emotional restoration (Strang 2002). Since victim redress has been one of the primary goals of RJ since its inception (Zehr 1990), many studies have been conducted on how victims experience RJ or how RJ may or may not function to help victims to achieve a sense of redress or resolution. Some of the earlier and influential studies from New Zealand (Maxwell et al. 2004; Maxwell and Morris 1993) found that a majority of victims reported that attending a conferencing was a helpful experience for them. As with many studies of RJ in the 1980s and 1990s, however, this study did not involve a comparison group. Indeed, the lack of controlled comparisons was one of the primary drivers of one of the, to date, best known studies on the use of RJ; the Reintegrative Shaming Experiment (RISE), which was conducted in Canberra. In RISE, property, violent and drink driving offenders were randomly assigned either to court or conferencing. One goal of RISE was to examine the effect of conferencing and court proceedings on victims (Strang 2002). According to this study, victims in conferencing reported a greater sense of fairness, a

higher restoration of feelings of security, and less fear than victims who went through the court process (Strang 2002). More recent studies in New Zealand as well as a 10-year follow-up on RISE have come to similar conclusions (NZ Ministry of Justice 2011b; Strang 2012).

Not all evaluative studies have found such marked differences in victim redress however. The SA Juvenile Justice (SAJJ) project involved data collection on youth offenders and victims who participated in youth conferences (Daly et al. 1998). Unlike RISE, SAJJ did not involve a comparison group because its objective was to examine the difference *within* conferencing rather than differences between conferencing and court. The SAJJ findings suggested that, whereas a sense of procedural fairness was reported by most victims, a sense of ‘restorativeness’—that is a mutual understanding between victims and offenders measured by indicators such as degree of young offenders’ understanding of the impact of crime on victims and degree of victims’ understanding of young offenders’ situations—were only present in about 30 percent of conferences (Daly 2003). Moreover, the SAJJ project also found a significant gap in the perceived sincerity of apology between victims (30 percent) and offenders (60 percent). Based on the SAJJ findings, Daly (2002) thus noted that the oft-repeated ‘nirvana story’ regarding differences between RJ and traditional youth justice practices was probably far more nuanced than previously reported.

Offender accountability

Another aim of RJ is offender accountability, particularly towards victims, but also towards others that have been harmed or impacted (Braithwaite and Roche 2001). Research conducted by Maxwell et al. (2004) in New Zealand found that most offenders reported that they understood victims and felt sorry for their offending. Such findings are congruent with later findings from the RISE studies including a 10-year follow-up (Sherman and Strang 2015; Strang et al. 2011) where offenders who participated in conferencing were more likely to feel

that their offending was wrong than those who appeared in court. Other studies also indicate that participating in RJ influenced offenders' behaviours post-conference, including high completion rates of agreement plans as well as sanctions such as community service (Maxwell et al. 2004, Maxwell and Morris 1993, Maxwell, Morris, and Anderson 1999).

Reintegration and reoffending

While victim redress and offender accountability are widely agreed-upon goals within RJ, the goal of reducing reoffending as a result of RJ interventions is more contested within the literature (Robinson and Shapland 2008). Reduced reoffending is nevertheless often set as a goal within administrative programme designs or aims such as the VIC Department of Health and Human Services (2015).

Accordingly, several comparative studies between conferencing and other criminal justice approaches such as courts have been conducted in Australia and New Zealand to examine the effects of conferencing in reducing reoffending. These studies show mixed results. Along with cross-sectional studies conducted in Australia (Luke and Lind 2002; Vignaendra and Fitzgerald 2006), the findings of a longitudinal study conducted in New Zealand showed a reduction in reoffending through RJ (NZ Ministry of Justice 2011a). This study used a statistically matched control group of adult offenders who participated in conferencing to examine the long-term effect of conferencing on reoffending. It found that offenders who participated in conferencing were less likely to reoffend in the following 12 months than those who did not (NZ Ministry of Justice 2011a). Follow-up on these offenders over three years indicated a consistent outcome, although these findings were not statistically significant (NZ Ministry of Justice 2014). However, other studies, primarily in Australia, have found no difference in reoffending (Jones 2009; Poynton 2013; Smith and Weatherburn

2012). Moreover, RISE showed that RJ was more effective in reducing reoffending among violent offenders than property offenders (Sherman, Strang, and Woods 2000).

The question of reoffending in Australia and New Zealand also brings up pointed problems related to arguments that RJ reflects aspects of Indigenous—particularly Māori—justice practices. Claims that FGC in New Zealand was based on Māori justice have been roundly criticised (Bradley, Tauri, and Walters 2006; Daly 2002), and research from both Australia and New Zealand has problematised the notion that RJ may be more useful or effective for Indigenous offenders than standard Western youth or criminal justice practices (Blagg 1997; Moyle and Tauri 2016). Similar to reoffending in other groups of offenders, studies on recidivism among Indigenous offenders shows mixed outcomes. Recently, the NZ Ministry of Justice conducted research on reoffending through RJ using a statistically matched comparison group (NZ Ministry of Justice n.d.). This study showed, amongst other things, that RJ has been effective in reducing reoffending among Māori offenders during a three-year follow-up period. However, based on RISE research, Strang and Sherman (2015) suggest that RJ may not be effective in reducing recidivism for Aboriginal offenders, although they cautioned that such outcomes may be attributed to the lack of statistical power because the sample size of Aboriginal offenders was small. This question thus warrants further research.

Community involvement

As Christie (1977) argues, community involvement is an important feature of RJ to empower participants and the community itself. While, to our knowledge, there is less research on this aspect of RJ in Australia and New Zealand, available evidence—particularly in regards to RJ for Indigenous offenders—shows that both Indigenous participants and Indigenous elders have reported the importance of community involvement (Cultural and Indigenous Research

Centre 2008; Potas et al. 2003). However, in relation to involvement of Indigenous communities in RJ, several caveats or problems have been raised, in particular the suitability or effectiveness of RJ for Australian Aboriginal peoples. Cunneen (1997) argues that RJ has been established without adequate consultation with Indigenous communities and organisations despite the fact that they have different understandings of crime and justice. Blagg (1998) has similarly voiced concern that RJ may function to re-colonise Indigenous peoples through lack of attention to cultural differences and lack of attention to autonomy and self-determination.

Recent research on community involvement conducted by Rossner and Bruce (2016) shows another potential challenge in relation to community involvement. Their study of pre-sentencing RJ for adult offenders in NSW suggests that community involvement may sometimes hinder the RJ process, as many community members are ‘repeat players,’ attending several conferences without being briefed or oriented towards restorative goals, and thus disrupting the RJ process.

Further directions for research and practice in restorative justice

Despite the growth of empirical literature on RJ internationally, much remains unknown about when and how RJ works (Saulnier and Sivasubramaniam 2015). This may be partly because most of extant empirical studies on RJ are outcome-oriented, seeking to ascertain effectiveness over conventional justice approaches. There are fewer studies to date focused on the question of determining the conditions and interactions under which RJ is successful.

Further studies are needed to ascertain two distinct sets of questions. The first set of questions involves investigation of what aspects of conferencing or other RJ processes are in turn related to particular restorative outcomes. It is not yet well-understood how important

each aspect of the conferencing process—preparation, conference, and follow up—is in terms of conferencing outcomes for participants (Suzuki and Wood 2017b). For example, does better preparation, all other things being equal, lead to markedly better conferencing outcomes? Such research will need to examine the entire conferencing process more closely including *before*, *during* and *after* conferencing, as participants’ attitudes and perceptions can change not only during the face-to-face dialogue but also through preparation and follow-up support or outcomes (Suzuki and Wood 2017b).

The second set of questions involves investigation of the interactions and dynamics of conferencing. Conferencing is a complex process, as interactions and dynamics of the process in each case can be distinct (Harris, Walgrave, and Braithwaite 2004). For example, while some conferencing may involve active verbal and non-verbal communication, other conferencing may not (Rossner, Bruce, and Meher 2013). To capture such dynamics *within* the process, in-depth analysis on the RJ process is necessary. Particularly, examining the views of participants and observing what is happening in the process is crucial to understanding ‘how’ RJ works in terms of the interactional dynamics between participants (Hayes 2006).

Restorative justice faces other challenges in Australia and New Zealand in the near future. In particular, the institutionalisation of RJ within youth and criminal justice systems has been essential to its continued expansion (Suzuki and Wood 2017a). At the same time, this institutionalisation has not infrequently resulted in the administrative re-direction or co-option of RJ programmes or practices for other goals (Suzuki and Wood 2017a; Wood and Suzuki 2016). For example, some research has found that RJ programmes tend to become offender-focused, leading to poor experiences for victims (Morris and Maxwell 1997; Strang 2002). Other research has found problems related to poor referral and inadequate explanation of RJ processes (People and Trimboli 2007; Stewart and Smith 2004; Suzuki and Wood

2017a). Existing research suggests that RJ faces similar problems in other countries (Choi, Gilbert, and Green 2013; Zernova 2007). As such, a primary focus for RJ in the near future must be on how to reconcile RJ ideals with its institutionalisation in ways that can better meet the needs of participants while continuing to expand in its institutional capacities within criminal and youth justice systems.

A second problem facing RJ is its uncertain relationship and benefits for Indigenous peoples. This is particularly problematic given the over-representation of Indigenous peoples in Australia and New Zealand in all aspects of the criminal justice system. This is a problem that has been recognised by virtually all leading RJ scholars in both countries, but with little consensus as to either the role that RJ can or *should* play in terms of such stratification, as well as the degree to which it may make things better or worse for Indigenous victims and offenders. RJ literature in the 1980s and 1990s was often naïve and unrealistic or uninformed regarding the ‘indigeneity’ of RJ practices such as FGC in New Zealand. Since this time, such claims have been muted in response to criticism, but what has not happened is the development of any clearer picture on whether or not RJ works better than traditional criminal justice practices in terms of victim redress, offender accountability or reintegration, and—importantly—community involvement or ownership of justice practices. Given the claims of some RJ proponents, and considering the scope of its use in Australia and New Zealand, it is problematic that so few rigorous empirical studies exist on these questions.

Conclusion

In this chapter, we have looked at the development, implementation, and evaluation of RJ in Australia and New Zealand. The origins of RJ in Australia and New Zealand are different and both countries have experienced distinct courses of development. Although evaluations of RJ

in Australia and New Zealand to date show that RJ contributes in particular to victim redress and offender accountability, several studies also challenge its effectiveness in terms of reducing reoffending. Restorative justice also faces challenges in terms of its increasing institutionalisation and potential co-option, as well as continued questions regarding its ability to work effectively for Indigenous victims and offenders, and within these communities. Nevertheless, it is also the case that RJ has made significant transformations of youth and criminal justice practices in Australia and New Zealand since its implementation in these countries, particularly in terms of victim involvement and redress, and in this regard both countries have been at the forefront of the development and widespread use of RJ in the last three decades. Whether this remains, and indeed whether RJ can confront its current challenges effectively in Australia and New Zealand, is less certain.

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