

Restorative justice helps victims, cuts crime

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Credit: Alan Cleaver

A major new international study has backed pioneering work by The Australian National University (ANU) into restorative justice, finding criminals are less likely to re-offend after meeting their victims face to face.

International research led by Cambridge University, launched at ANU on Friday, has found Restorative Justice Conferences, pioneered in Canberra, helped both the criminals and the [victims](#) of their crimes.

It found the frequency of repeat offending to be down as much as 55 percent for some offences, compared to those dealt with by the criminal justice system without restorative meetings with their victims.

Victims of crime also reported greater satisfaction with the outcomes compared to those dealt with through the courts, as well as lower levels of post-traumatic stress from the crime.

"Because crime hurts, justice should heal," said ANU Professor John Braithwaite, who helped develop Restorative Justice Conferences in Canberra in the 1990s.

"When a real victim of serious crime is in the room, it can have a big effect on re-offending.

"Now we have results from studies of the highest quality around the world to show that it works."

Restorative Justice Conferences can be used either as an alternative or as a supplement to the courts.

They involve victims and their criminals agreeing to meet with family or friends present, with police or other trained moderators, to discuss how to repair the harm a crime has caused.

Victims have a direct say on what the offender will agree to do, and are free to speak about the pain and anguish of the offence.

Developed by ANU and pioneered in Canberra from early programs in New Zealand, they are now used in one form or another in every Australian state and in most countries around the world.

ACT Attorney-General Simon Corbell said the review proved the

benefits of Restorative Justice Programs, which were first used in the ACT.

"The evidence is clear. Victims who participate in restorative justice are more satisfied with their restorative justice experience than those whose cases are dealt with in court," Mr Corbell said.

The international review of Restorative Justice Conferences, led by Dr Heather Strang and Professor Lawrence Sherman of the Institute of Criminology at the University of Cambridge, examined 10 studies across three continents.

The review covered 1,879 offenders who were tracked over two years, and interviews with 734 victims. They found Restorative Justice Conferences had a solid benefit to the community, and to the victims of crimes.

In the UK alone, repeat convictions were down by 27 per cent in the two years following a Restorative Justice Conference.

"The effect of conferencing on victims' satisfaction with the handling of their cases is uniformly positive," said Dr Strang.

"Among the kinds of cases in which both offenders and victims are willing to meet, Restorative Justice Conferences seem highly likely to reduce future crime, not only by the offenders, but also by reducing the victims' anger and desire for violent revenge.

"Victims' satisfaction with the handling of their cases is consistently higher for victims assigned to Restorative Justice Conferences than for victims whose cases were assigned to normal [criminal justice](#) processing" said Dr Strang, who is Deputy Director of the Jerry Lee Centre of Experimental Criminology at the University of Cambridge.

The study, by Dr Strang and her colleagues, was peer-reviewed and approved by the international Crime and Justice Steering Group of the Campbell Collaboration, a global consortium for evidence-based policy hosted by the Norwegian government.

Part of the study will also be published soon in the United States by the *Journal of Quantitative Criminology*.

More information: The full report is available online:
www.campbellcollaboration.org/lib/download/3066/

Provided by Australian National University

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