

Restorative justice could help victims of institutional child sex abuse – report

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Restorative justice could be useful to help repair harm in some cases of

institutional child sex abuse, according to a UNSW report released by the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse.

The UNSW report, "The use and effectiveness of restorative justice in [criminal justice](#) systems following child [sexual abuse](#) or comparable harms", is among a suite of papers released by the Royal Commission that will inform the Commission's criminal justice work.

Restorative justice emphasises repairing the harm caused by criminal behaviour by bringing together all those involved – victims, perpetrators or institutional representatives, and people close to victims – to talk about the impact of a crime and a way forward. It also encourages offenders to take responsibility for their actions.

The Royal Commission asked the UNSW research team led by Dr Jane Bolitho to undertake a literature review to examine the research evidence on the effectiveness of restorative justice approaches in relation to [child sexual abuse](#).

The use of restorative justice in Western countries has grown exponentially over the past two decades as an alternative to traditional criminal justice options for young offenders.

Dr Bolitho's review found evidence that suggested restorative justice is being practised to good effect following sexual abuse, in cases where the focus is on the victim, experts in [sexual violence](#) are closely involved with the programs, skilled and experienced facilitators are used, and participants are screened as suitable and adequately prepared and debriefed.

Dr Bolitho, a lecturer in UNSW's School of Social Sciences, says there is evidence that under specific conditions, participation in restorative

justice programs improves victim well being and is perceived by victims as satisfying, worthwhile and procedurally fair.

She says best practice exists in models such as Project Restore in New Zealand where restorative justice has been used for adult survivors to address sexual violence since 2005.

Useful research based on rigour, relevance and sample size relates also to the South Australian Family Conferencing models studied over many years, says Dr Bolitho.

"This work compares court to restorative conference outcomes for young people who have committed sexual offences. The findings suggest that matters are dealt with more quickly through conferencing than court, more perpetrators agree to stay away from victims, and more perpetrators offer apologies," she says.

"In addition, offenders are more likely to participate in a treatment program tailored to address the reasons for sex offending."

More information: The report is available online:
[www.childabuseroyalcommission. . . child-sexual-abuse-o](http://www.childabuseroyalcommission.gov.au/reports/child-sexual-abuse-0)

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