

Research reveals restorative justice reduces recidivism

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Restorative justice programs, such victim-offender mediation and community impact panels, are more effective in reducing recidivism rates among juvenile offenders than traditional court processing, a study by researchers at Sam Houston State University found.

"Our results generally not only support the effectiveness of RJ (restorative justice) programming as compared to traditional juvenile court processing but also suggest that each type of RJ intervention, even those that are minimally involved, reduces recidivism risk relative to juvenile court proceedings," said Jeffrey Bouffard, a Professor in the Department of Criminal Justice and Criminology and Research Director for the Correctional Management Institute of Texas at Sam Houston State University. "This pattern of results would suggest that in many cases, it may be possible to use less intensive RJ approaches and still receive promising results."

The study, published in *Youth Violence and Juvenile Justice*, examined four types of restorative justice programs for [juvenile offenders](#) in a small, mostly rural area in the upper Midwest. These interventions include face-to-face mediation between victims and offenders, indirect communication between victims and offenders, community panels who stand in for the victim, and even minimal RJ interventions that simply educate offenders about the restorative justice process.

The study, based on 551 youth who were assigned to restorative justice or traditional court proceedings between 2000 and 2005, found that 40

percent of the juveniles committed a new offense within the average 3.5-year study period. Youth processed through juvenile courts re-offended nearly 50 percent of the time, while those in a minimal restorative justice educational program committed new offenses only 31 percent of the time. More intensive restorative justice programs also had fewer new offenses than juvenile court cases, including 24 percent for community panels, 27 percent for indirect mediation, and 33 percent for direct mediation.

The youth in the study averaged about 15 years old and were involved in such offenses as property crimes, curfew violations, alcohol and tobacco charges, drug possession, traffic offenses, disorderly conduct, and even some violent crimes. The study suggested that juveniles could be screened for risk factors, with less serious [offenders](#) assigned to minimal [restorative justice](#) programs, such as writing a letter to the victim, while repeat offender would be required to participate in more intense face-to-face mediation with victims.

More information: "The Effectiveness of Various Restorative Justice Interventions on Recidivism Outcomes Among Juvenile Offender," by Bouffard and Maisha Cooper of SHSU and Kathleen Bergseth of North Dakota State University, is available from *Youth Violence and Juvenile Justice* at [yvj.sagepub.com/content/early/ ... 647428.full.pdf+html](http://yvj.sagepub.com/content/early/.../647428.full.pdf+html)

Provided by Sam Houston State University

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