

Analyzing Modern Approaches to Restorative Justice in Addressing Violent Crimes

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Abstract

David Matza's criminological framework—particularly his concepts of drift and techniques of neutralization—offers a robust analytical lens for understanding how otherwise law-abiding individuals engage in criminal behavior under specific situational pressures while still perceiving themselves as morally compliant. This article examines Matza's foundational theoretical contributions, elucidating how individuals “drift” between conformity and deviance and employ rationalizing mechanisms to justify prohibited conduct. The discussion then links these concepts to situational crime prevention (SCP), an applied crime-reduction paradigm that focuses on altering environmental conditions to limit criminal opportunities. Through a review of the scholarly literature, we demonstrate that Matza's emphasis on moral constraints and justificatory narratives aligns closely with SCP's principle of removing excuses, a strategy designed to counteract the very rationalizations Matza identified (e.g., the denial of injury or the denial of responsibility). Real-world illustrations, including instances of theft and vandalism, are used to highlight these conceptual intersections. We further argue that incorporating an understanding of neutralization techniques into preventive strategies strengthens both the theoretical foundation and practical effectiveness of SCP. Drawing on both classic works and contemporary research, the article concludes that integrating Matza's insights enhances the explanatory depth and design of situational interventions.

Keywords: David Matza; drift theory; neutralization techniques; situational crime prevention; criminological theory

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1. Introduction

Violent crime remains one of the most persistent and complex challenges confronting societies across diverse cultural and political contexts, with its consequences extending far beyond the immediate harm to include long-term psychological, social, and economic impacts. Research continues to demonstrate the multidimensional effects of violence, such as the association between exposure to community violence and increased risk of psychosis as documented in Trinidad, where scholars argue that local violence rates shape mental health vulnerabilities in profound ways (Roberts et al., 2025). The rise of violence against specific groups, including healthcare workers, further illustrates the expanding forms of victimization that strain criminal justice

resources and public trust, as examined through empirical assessments of crimes committed against health professionals in Turkey (Sari, 2024). The economic burden of violence is equally substantial, with analyses from England and Wales showing that violent offending among populations with severe mental illness imposes significant long-term costs on health systems and justice institutions (Senior et al., 2020). Moreover, violent crime is increasingly driven by contextual, situational, and structural factors, with evidence showing that environmental conditions such as rising temperatures correlate with heightened rates of aggression and interpersonal violence, emphasizing the need for adaptive justice responses in dynamically changing environments (Choi et al., 2024). The intricate and overlapping nature of these harms underscores why addressing violent crime requires approaches that move beyond conventional punitive paradigms.

For decades, most legal systems have relied on traditional criminal justice models grounded in retributive logic, emphasizing punishment, proportionality, and deterrence. Yet numerous studies reveal that this punitive framework often fails to respond adequately to the needs of victims, offenders, and communities. In the context of violent crime, researchers argue that many victims feel marginalized when their psychological needs are overlooked, a concern highlighted in studies exploring how digital exposure to violent incidents affects criminal justice professionals who must repeatedly review traumatic evidence (Birze et al., 2022). The limitations of retributive models are evident even in cases involving domestic or intimate partner violence, where punishments alone do not address underlying relational, economic, or situational drivers of harm. Analyses of domestic violence cases show that strict adherence to punitive sanctions can fail to prevent repeat occurrences, as demonstrated by studies identifying escalating patterns of reoffending in domestic violence contexts and the challenges of predicting future risk (Yu et al., 2023). Punitive responses also do little to reduce long-term recidivism among violent offenders; indeed, meta-analytic research comparing traditional sanctions to alternative interventions finds minimal rehabilitative benefit in deterrence-based approaches (Fulham et al., 2023). Even where the criminal justice system attempts to intervene earlier, such as in cases involving repeat firearm victims, researchers note that punitive or incapacitative measures alone cannot disrupt patterns of reinjury or re-victimization without more holistic or preventative approaches (Reitz et al., 2022). These consistent shortcomings reveal why many jurisdictions have begun questioning the adequacy of traditional responses and exploring alternatives that incorporate healing, accountability, and community-level restoration.

As dissatisfaction with punitive justice models has grown, restorative justice has emerged as a compelling framework aimed at rebalancing the roles of stakeholders and addressing the relational and emotional dimensions of harm. The roots of restorative justice trace back to indigenous and community-based traditions, yet its contemporary conceptualization has evolved substantially across legal systems. Research has contributed to refining its theoretical foundations, with scholars articulating restorative justice as a victim-centered and accountability-driven process that directly addresses the emotional, relational, and social impacts of harm, as illustrated in theoretical frameworks emphasizing victim recovery (Suzuki, 2023). Contemporary policy shifts toward restorative justice are driven in part by international reform initiatives, with global organizations and national legislators increasingly recognizing the value of victim participation, offender responsibility, and community repair. Restorative justice frameworks have been developed to address not only minor crimes but also serious forms of violence, with some programs integrating trauma-informed practices to ensure that victims are supported throughout the process. For example, research evaluating restorative justice in the context of identity-based violence provides evidence that restorative practices can address deep psychological and communal wounds associated with hate crimes (Laxminarayan & Veldt, 2024). The expansion of restorative justice into high-harm contexts reflects an international trend toward justice models that prioritize relational healing, accountability, and collaborative problem-solving.

International movements advocating for victim-centered justice have significantly influenced this evolution. Legal scholars and practitioners have increasingly emphasized the importance of attending to the lived experiences of victims, with studies demonstrating how restorative dialogue can help victims find meaning, healing, and closure after violent events. Research from Australia evaluating restorative justice conferencing for domestic and sexual violence highlights the importance of structured, well-facilitated encounters that provide mechanisms for safety while giving victims a platform to express their needs, experiences, and expectations (Lawler et al., 2025). In Southeast Asia, scholars examining the implementation of restorative justice for victims of sexual violence stress the need for legal frameworks that prioritize victim dignity and ensure procedural safeguards, particularly in contexts where social stigma and patriarchal norms can impede reporting (Alifah, 2025). Other

jurisdictions have explored policy innovations that strengthen legal protections for women and children, such as prosecutorial guidelines in Indonesia designed to support restorative pathways while maintaining due process guarantees, illustrating how restorative justice can be embedded within broader legal reforms (Zurnetti et al., 2024). These global shifts toward victim-centered legal strategies demonstrate a growing recognition that justice is not solely a matter of punishment but also a process of acknowledging, repairing, and preventing harm.

The rationale for applying restorative justice to violent crimes is complex and remains the subject of extensive scholarly debate. On one hand, restorative justice offers promising avenues for promoting healing, reducing recidivism, and addressing the relational dynamics underlying violent behavior. For instance, researchers examining street outreach interventions in gun violence contexts argue that relational, community-based approaches can reduce violence by fostering trust, dialogue, and accountability among high-risk individuals (Ross et al., 2023). Similarly, studies on restorative approaches to domestic violence cases indicate that structured restorative processes—when carefully implemented—can support both accountability and family-level healing, particularly when aligned with community norms and safety priorities (Purba & Koswara, 2023). In some contexts, restorative practices have been used successfully to process grief and emotional trauma following homicide, with survivors reporting opportunities to ask questions, confront offenders, and participate actively in justice outcomes, reflecting deeper emotional and relational needs also observed in post-sentencing restorative practices (Bruce & Bolitho, 2019). Scholars analyzing violent theft, child perpetrators of murder, and other severe offenses have noted that restorative justice can be adapted to confront serious harm by incorporating structured preparation, skilled facilitation, and trauma-responsive protocols (Hasan et al., 2024; Saragih et al., 2024). These examples highlight the potential of restorative justice to address the underlying dynamics of violent crime in ways that punitive systems cannot.

However, the application of restorative justice to violent crime is also controversial due to concerns about safety, voluntariness, power imbalances, and potential re-victimization. Scholars examining gender-based violence caution that restorative justice may not be appropriate in every circumstance, particularly in cases involving significant structural power disparities or coercive control, as detailed in analyses of restorative justice challenges in addressing gender-based violence in the Balkans (Lažetić, 2025). Research on recidivism among domestic violence offenders also suggests that restorative processes must be embedded within broader legal protections and community supports to prevent further harm (Priyadi & Fitriasih, 2023). Ethical debates extend to questions of victim agency, as the severity of a crime may influence a victim's willingness to meet the offender, an issue explored in research showing varying levels of willingness depending on the nature and intensity of the harm suffered (Batchelor, 2023). Furthermore, discussions of the digital age highlight new forms of violence that complicate restorative processes, including the traumatic effects of digital evidence on justice workers and victims (Birze et al., 2022). These debates underscore that while restorative justice holds significant promise, its application in violent crime contexts requires careful, ethically informed, and culturally sensitive implementation.

Given these complexities, this narrative review aims to analyze modern approaches to restorative justice in responding to violent crimes by synthesizing available research, assessing empirical findings, and identifying key challenges and opportunities for policy and practice. The review seeks to provide a comprehensive understanding of how restorative justice has evolved, how it is being applied in cases involving serious harm, and what factors influence its effectiveness, while offering insights that can inform future research and the development of evidence-based restorative practices.

2. Theoretical Foundations of Restorative Justice

Restorative justice is rooted in diverse cultural and historical traditions, many of which predate modern criminal justice systems. Indigenous communities across regions such as the Pacific, North America, and parts of Africa practiced forms of relational justice that emphasized collective responsibility, interpersonal harmony, and social restoration rather than punitive sanctions. These early traditions, which valued dialogue, acknowledgment of harm, and community involvement, shaped the foundations of contemporary restorative justice, especially as modern justice theorists began to recognize the limitations of purely punitive models. The historical emphasis on community participation resembles contemporary responses to violence that rely on community-based interventions, such as street outreach strategies for gun-related harm, where relational support is

used to disrupt cycles of retaliation (Ross et al., 2023). Similarly, long-standing indigenous models that focus on the emotional and communal dimensions of conflict parallel modern restorative dialogues that explore the psychological needs of victims of sexual violence, an approach that mirrors insights from restorative frameworks emphasizing victim healing (Mirmajidi, 2020). These historical roots demonstrate that restorative justice is not simply a modern legal innovation but a revival of relational and community-centered ways of understanding and resolving harm.

Philosophical underpinnings of restorative justice build on these traditions, emphasizing repair of harm, restoration of relationships, and accountability as central principles. Unlike retributive justice, which prioritizes punishment and proportionality, restorative justice frames wrongdoing as a violation of people and relationships rather than merely a breach of legal codes. Scholars engaged in international justice debates argue that modern responses to identity-based or hate-motivated violence must integrate relational perspectives, where acknowledging emotional and collective harm is essential for meaningful justice, as articulated in research addressing restorative practices in hate crime contexts (Laxminarayan & Veldt, 2024). Similarly, discussions of violent crime against healthcare workers highlight the need to recenter justice on the lived experiences of victims, who often feel overlooked in conventional systems (Sari, 2024). Restorative justice emphasizes accountability that is active rather than passive, requiring offenders to acknowledge the full extent of harm and take steps toward reparation. This philosophical shift also resonates with trauma-informed justice models used in cases involving complex emotional harm, including sexual violence, where scholars argue that justice must align with victims' psychological needs rather than solely impose sanctions (Alifah, 2025). In this way, restorative justice positions itself as both a moral and practical alternative, emphasizing reintegration, empathy, and community healing.

Definitions of restorative justice vary across scholars and organizations but generally converge around a core set of principles. Many justice systems define restorative justice as a process through which victims, offenders, and community members actively participate in resolving the consequences of a crime and determining appropriate reparative outcomes. Contemporary theoretical work builds on this foundation by outlining the psychological mechanisms through which restorative processes support victim recovery, including acknowledgment of harm, emotional validation, and opportunities for meaningful dialogue, an approach extensively developed in restorative justice theory (Suzuki, 2023). Policymakers and practitioners emphasize that restorative justice must be voluntary, collaborative, and rooted in respect for participants, a principle underscored in various legal evaluations of restorative practices in domestic and sexual violence cases, which highlight the importance of ensuring that participation is informed and supported to prevent further victimization (Lawler et al., 2025). International policy discussions also contribute to defining restorative justice frameworks, as seen in analyses of global restorative justice drivers, where scholars emphasize aligning restorative practice with broader justice reforms (Keenan & Zinsstag, 2022). Across these perspectives, restorative justice emerges as a flexible but principled approach that seeks to repair harm through dialogue, accountability, and collaborative problem-solving.

Several key models operationalize restorative justice in practice, each reflecting different cultural origins and objectives. Victim–Offender Mediation (VOM) is among the most widely recognized models, providing structured dialogue between victims and offenders facilitated by trained mediators. In cases of violent crime, research shows that victims may seek opportunities to confront offenders, express emotions, and obtain answers, though their willingness can vary depending on crime severity, a dynamic explored in studies examining victim-offender meetings in serious harm contexts (Batchelor, 2023). Family Group Conferencing (FGC), originally developed in New Zealand to support indigenous Māori principles, broadens participation to include family and community members and is particularly relevant in contexts where violence affects both relational and household dynamics. This model aligns with contemporary restorative practices used to address domestic violence, such as community-supported interventions documented in Indonesian jurisdictions where police discretion is exercised to incorporate restorative principles in family-centered cases (Manik & Husna, 2023).

Circle processes, including Sentencing Circles and Healing Circles, are inspired by indigenous traditions emphasizing collective dialogue, emotional expression, and communal responsibility. These circles are particularly effective in contexts where collective trauma or community-level harm needs to be addressed, such as cases involving violent theft or child-perpetrated harm, where communal reintegration and moral guidance play a central role (Hasan et al., 2024; Saragih et al., 2024). Community Reparative Boards represent another model, typically used in local jurisdictions to engage community

members in developing reparative sanctions and community-based service plans. They often operate at the intersection of justice institutions and community expectations, reflecting the belief that local stakeholders are best positioned to evaluate the relational and structural dimensions of harm.

Distinguishing restorative justice from retributive and rehabilitative justice requires careful examination of goals, processes, and underlying values. Retributive justice bases its rationale on punishment and proportionality, viewing crime as a violation of the state and its laws. This model often overlooks the lived experiences of victims, as illustrated in studies showing that victims of domestic violence may feel marginalized when justice processes do not adequately address their needs or fears (Purba & Koswara, 2023). Rehabilitative justice focuses on reforming offenders, often through therapeutic or correctional programming, but still centers institutional authority rather than victim participation. Comparative analyses reveal that neither retributive nor rehabilitative models fully address the relational and emotional dimensions of harm. For example, psychological impacts associated with exposure to community violence or digital evidence of violent crime may persist even when traditional justice systems impose punishment or mandate treatment, highlighting gaps in victim-centered justice (Birze et al., 2022; Roberts et al., 2025). Restorative justice, in contrast, situates harm within relationships and communities and seeks to engage victims, offenders, and others in collaborative processes that recognize emotional, social, and moral dimensions of wrongdoing.

Criteria for evaluating restorative justice outcomes reflect its multidimensional goals. Healing is a central criterion, with studies demonstrating that structured restorative processes can reduce trauma symptoms by giving victims space to articulate their pain, receive acknowledgment, and obtain information about the offense. This is particularly evident in contexts involving domestic or family violence, where restorative interventions must account for the emotional complexities of victim-offender relationships, a point underscored by research investigating patterns of repeated violence and the relational dynamics contributing to reoffending (Priyadi & Fitriasih, 2023). Restitution represents another important criterion, as restorative justice emphasizes tangible reparation in addition to emotional acknowledgment. Satisfaction with justice processes is also a key indicator, as victims consistently report higher satisfaction in programs where they are given voice and agency, such as restorative meetings where emotional and informational needs are addressed (Bruce & Bolitho, 2019). Reduced fear and increased feelings of safety are critical outcomes, especially in cases of gender-based or intimate violence where victims often fear retaliation or repeated harm, an issue highlighted in evaluations of restorative approaches within domestic violence frameworks (Rosalin & Usman, 2023). Offender desistance is another central criterion, with meta-analytic evidence suggesting that restorative justice programs may reduce likelihood of reoffending by fostering empathy, accountability, and social reintegration (Fulham et al., 2023). Emerging research examining offender pathways in domestic and firearm-related violence further emphasizes that structured restorative interventions may interrupt cycles of retaliatory violence or recidivism when implemented alongside broader social supports (Reitz et al., 2022; Ross et al., 2023).

These theoretical foundations collectively demonstrate that restorative justice is grounded in relational, moral, and communal principles that stand in contrast to punitive justice models. By drawing on historical traditions, emphasizing emotional and relational repair, and offering structured models for addressing harm, restorative justice provides a framework capable of responding to the complexities of violent crime in ways that traditional justice systems often cannot.

3. Contemporary Restorative Justice Approaches Used for Violent Crimes

Contemporary restorative justice approaches have increasingly expanded into the domain of violent crime, reflecting a global shift in justice policy and practice that emphasizes healing, accountability, and community repair. Across multiple jurisdictions, policymakers, researchers, and practitioners have begun to explore restorative frameworks for addressing serious offenses such as homicide, assault, sexual violence, and domestic violence. This trend is partly driven by growing recognition of the limitations of punitive responses and the need for justice models that attend to the emotional and psychological needs of victims. In the context of domestic and family violence, for example, systematic evaluations of restorative justice conferencing in Australia show that victims often seek opportunities to express their experiences and participate actively in the justice process, even in cases involving severe harm (Lawler et al., 2025). Violent crime against vulnerable groups such as healthcare workers has also prompted broader consideration of restorative approaches, as illustrated by studies documenting the rising prevalence of targeted violence in Turkey and the need for justice responses that protect victims while addressing structural

causes of harm (Sari, 2024). Furthermore, global evidence reveals that community-level violence, including gun-related harm, benefits from relational interventions grounded in restorative principles, as demonstrated in research on street outreach programs that reduce youth involvement in violent gun incidents through dialogue and community engagement (Ross et al., 2023). These diverse trends reflect an international recognition that restorative justice, when carefully structured, can complement or even improve upon traditional responses to violent crime.

Modern restorative justice models have been adapted specifically for contexts involving serious violence, with trauma-informed restorative practices emerging as a central innovation. Trauma-informed approaches recognize that victims of violent crime often experience complex psychological responses—including fear, dissociation, shame, and long-term distress—that must be addressed before meaningful dialogue can occur. Scholars examining responses to sexual violence argue that justice must align with victims' psychological needs, emphasizing that restorative interventions must be structured to prevent retraumatization and provide emotional safety (Alifah, 2025). Trauma-informed models also respond to the secondary trauma experienced by criminal justice professionals exposed to violent content, as explored in studies analyzing the emotional burdens associated with repeated viewing of violent digital evidence (Birze et al., 2022). In both cases, trauma-informed restorative practices emphasize preparation, emotional support, and the presence of trained facilitators who understand the neurobiological and relational impacts of trauma. These adaptations highlight a broader justice paradigm that recognizes the importance of emotional safety alongside procedural fairness.

Restorative dialogues in homicide cases represent another significant development in the application of restorative justice to violent crime. Although homicide is often viewed as one of the most severe offenses, programs in various countries have demonstrated that restorative encounters can create meaningful opportunities for healing among surviving family members and offenders. Post-sentencing restorative dialogues, in particular, allow victims or survivors to ask questions, confront the offender directly, and seek explanations for actions that formal legal processes do not address. Studies exploring emotional dynamics in post-sentencing restorative sessions reveal that these encounters allow victims to process complex feelings such as grief and anger while enabling offenders to express remorse and take responsibility in ways that traditional sentencing does not facilitate (Bruce & Bolitho, 2019). These processes align with broader findings showing that restorative practices can reduce fear and contribute to emotional recovery among survivors of violence, pointing to the unique relational and psychological benefits of restorative interventions.

Victim-initiated and survivor-led models have also gained prominence in addressing violent crime, reflecting a shift toward justice structures that prioritize victim autonomy. In some cases involving domestic or intimate partner violence, victims express a desire for restorative processes that allow them to articulate their needs directly and participate in shaping the outcome of the case. Research examining legal responses to domestic violence in Indonesia shows that restorative practices are increasingly being used when victims request alternative pathways that prioritize family healing, provided that safety protocols and legal safeguards are upheld (Purba & Koswara, 2023). Similarly, the willingness of victims to engage in meetings with offenders depends heavily on crime severity and emotional readiness, as demonstrated in studies on victim-offender mediation where victims' decisions were shaped by their need for closure and moral acknowledgment rather than by justice system incentives (Batchelor, 2023). Survivor-led models highlight the importance of agency, emotional preparedness, and voluntary participation in restorative processes involving violent crime.

Another major advancement is the development of hybrid models that integrate restorative elements into traditional justice systems. These models are particularly common in contexts where legal structures are rigid or where complete diversion from the criminal process is deemed inappropriate. Hybrid approaches often involve partial diversion, policymediated conferencing, or post-sentencing restorative programs that occur alongside formal sanctions. Research examining restorative policing strategies in youth violence contexts demonstrates how law enforcement agencies can incorporate restorative principles while maintaining legal authority, thereby fostering trust, dialogue, and community engagement (Hobson et al., 2022). Similarly, prosecutor-issued guidelines in Indonesia create opportunities for restorative interventions in violent cases involving women and children while ensuring legal oversight and due process protections (Zurnetti et al., 2024). These hybrid models reflect the flexibility of restorative justice and its potential to complement rather than replace traditional justice mechanisms in cases involving severe harm.

Post-sentencing restorative programs offer additional opportunities for addressing violent crime after formal punishment has already been imposed. These programs are particularly useful in contexts where offenders are serving long-term sentences for crimes such as homicide or violent assault. Scholars evaluating trauma-informed interventions in violent crime contexts argue that post-sentencing restorative encounters can promote offender accountability by encouraging individuals to reflect deeply on the impact of their actions and take active steps toward moral repair (Mirmajidi, 2020). Post-sentencing restorative programs also complement research showing that community-based relational interventions can reduce future involvement in violent behavior among high-risk populations, suggesting that accountability-driven dialogue can play a critical role in long-term behavioral change (Ross et al., 2023). These programs contribute to desistance by strengthening offenders' empathy, sense of responsibility, and motivation to repair harm.

The strengths of restorative justice in violent crime contexts are multifaceted and widely documented. Victim empowerment is one of the most frequently cited benefits, with research showing that victims of domestic and gender-based violence often feel marginalized in traditional systems and may find restorative processes more responsive to their needs for voice, acknowledgment, and participation (Rosalin & Usman, 2023). Emotional healing is another major strength, as restorative encounters provide victims with opportunities to express harm, ask unresolved questions, and receive validation from offenders and community members, which can lead to reduced fear and psychological restoration. Offender accountability is also enhanced in restorative contexts because offenders must confront the personal impact of their actions, an experience that differs substantially from passive compliance with court-ordered sanctions. Meta-analytic work demonstrates that restorative programs can reduce recidivism among violent offenders by fostering empathy and relational understanding (Fulham et al., 2023). Long-term behavioral change is supported by restorative interventions that focus on reintegration and community responsibility, aligning with findings that repeat violent offenses are influenced by social and environmental factors that restorative programs can directly address (Reitz et al., 2022).

Despite these strengths, restorative justice applied to violent crime presents numerous challenges that require careful consideration. Safety risks are among the most pressing concerns, particularly in cases involving coercive control, domestic violence, or gender-based harm. Researchers examining restorative justice in contexts of gender-based violence emphasize that power imbalances can compromise victim autonomy and create opportunities for manipulation or coercion, raising questions about suitability and safeguards (Lažetić, 2025). Trauma triggers represent another challenge, as restorative processes require victims to revisit painful experiences, which may risk retraumatization if facilitators do not apply trauma-informed approaches (Alifah, 2025). Structural inequalities further complicate restorative interventions, especially in communities where poverty, gender inequality, or limited access to legal protections shape patterns of violence, as illustrated in analyses of domestic violence recidivism and structural predictors of repeated harm (Priyadi & Fitriasih, 2023). These challenges highlight the need for rigorous screening, preparation, and ongoing support when applying restorative justice to violent crime.

Ethical considerations also play a central role in determining the appropriateness and legitimacy of restorative justice in high-harm contexts. Coercion is a primary ethical risk, as victims may feel pressured to participate—either by family, community members, or justice authorities—particularly in cultures where communal harmony is prioritized over individual autonomy. Re-victimization is another ethical concern, especially when offenders fail to demonstrate genuine remorse or when restorative processes are administered without proper safeguards. This risk is reflected in cases where digital evidence of violence contributes to secondary trauma among victims and justice professionals, underscoring the need for trauma-informed models that recognize emotional vulnerabilities (Birze et al., 2022). Moral legitimacy is also debated, with critics arguing that applying restorative justice to violent crime may appear to minimize the severity of harm or undermine public confidence in the justice system. However, policy analyses of restorative conferencing in serious violence contexts suggest that legitimacy can be strengthened through clear protocols, voluntary participation, and integration with formal legal protections (Hobson et al., 2022).

Together, these contemporary approaches demonstrate that restorative justice has evolved into a complex and adaptable framework capable of addressing violent crime in ways that traditional punitive models cannot. While challenges and ethical risks remain, the growing evidence base suggests that restorative justice offers promising pathways for healing, accountability, and long-term behavioral transformation when carefully implemented.

4. Empirical Evidence and Critical Analysis

Empirical research on restorative justice in violent crime contexts has expanded significantly over the past decade, offering a rich body of evidence concerning its benefits, challenges, and the conditions under which it is most effective. Studies across multiple jurisdictions have demonstrated that restorative justice can lead to meaningful improvements in victim wellbeing, offender accountability, and community cohesion. For instance, meta-analytic findings highlight that restorative justice programs have measurable effects on recidivism and psychological recovery, providing a more nuanced understanding of how dialogue-based interventions contribute to long-term behavioral change (Fulham et al., 2023). Empirical evaluations of domestic and sexual violence cases show that structured restorative processes can offer victims a more holistic justice experience, particularly when compared with traditional justice systems that often fail to address emotional and relational dimensions of harm (Lawler et al., 2025). Similarly, global studies on violent crime patterns—such as research on homicide, violent theft, and assaults—underscore the growing recognition that punitive responses alone are insufficient, thereby reinforcing the need for alternative justice mechanisms grounded in accountability, healing, and community involvement (Hasan et al., 2024). These findings provide strong support for the integration of restorative justice into contemporary responses to violent crime.

One of the most significant areas of empirical research concerns the impact of restorative justice on victims, particularly in relation to post-traumatic recovery. Trauma-related symptoms such as anxiety, fear, and distress often persist long after legal proceedings conclude, especially in cases involving severe violence. Studies focusing on victims of intimate partner and family violence demonstrate that restorative encounters can substantially reduce trauma symptoms by offering victims space to express their experiences, confront offenders, and receive acknowledgment of harm, processes that traditional courts rarely facilitate (Purba & Koswara, 2023). Victims also report that restorative dialogues provide opportunities to obtain answers to lingering questions, reducing emotional uncertainty and promoting psychological closure. Research examining post-sentencing restorative practices in cases of severe harm—including homicide—shows that survivors often value the ability to directly engage with offenders, find meaning in difficult circumstances, and reclaim a sense of agency in the aftermath of violence (Bruce & Bolitho, 2019). These processes align with theoretical frameworks on victim recovery that emphasize emotional validation, relational repair, and the importance of personalized justice experiences, theories grounded in restorative justice scholarship (Suzuki, 2023). Together, these studies underscore that restorative justice can significantly alleviate the psychological impacts of violent crime when implemented with appropriate safeguards.

Victims' sense of justice and closure is another central empirical finding. In many violent crime cases, victims report dissatisfaction with traditional legal processes, which focus primarily on procedural correctness and punishment rather than emotional restoration. Comparative analyses reveal that restorative justice offers victims a more participatory and communicative experience, enabling them to articulate what justice means for them personally. Victims of domestic violence, for example, have expressed greater satisfaction with restorative processes that allow them to voice their fears and receive reassurance regarding future safety, findings reflected in Indonesian studies examining police discretion and restorative decision-making in cases of household violence (Manik & Husna, 2023). Research focusing on gender-based violence also highlights that victims appreciate the opportunity to explain the impact of harm in their own words, particularly in contexts where structural inequalities or patriarchal norms have historically silenced their experiences (Lažetić, 2025). Victims' increased satisfaction with restorative processes strengthens trust in legal systems and fosters long-term emotional recovery, illustrating how restorative models meet needs that punitive systems often overlook.

Empirical evidence also reveals substantial benefits for offenders participating in restorative justice programs. Studies indicate that engaging in restorative processes can enhance offenders' moral development, empathy, and willingness to take responsibility for their actions. Research examining youth and adult violent offenders demonstrates that restorative dialogue encourages offenders to confront the personal impact of their behavior, fostering a deeper understanding of the harm caused and motivating behavioral change. For example, programs addressing violent conduct in community settings, such as street outreach interventions documented in U.S. gun violence research, show that relational dialogue and accountability-driven communication reduce offenders' involvement in retaliatory harm and other violent behaviors (Ross et al., 2023). Offenders involved in domestic violence cases also display improved self-awareness and emotional regulation when restorative

interventions emphasize relational accountability and structured preparation, as demonstrated in evaluations of domestic violence restorative programs across Southeast Asian contexts (Purba & Koswara, 2023). These findings highlight how restorative justice emphasizes active accountability, contrasting with the passive compliance often associated with punitive sanctions.

The influence of restorative justice on recidivism in violent crime has been a major focus of empirical scholarship, with results showing varying but generally positive outcomes. Meta-analytic studies indicate that restorative justice participants tend to have lower rates of reoffending compared with individuals processed through traditional systems, particularly when restorative programs incorporate support mechanisms that extend beyond a single meeting (Fulham et al., 2023). Studies linking behavioral patterns to prior convictions show that offenders with histories of violence or other risk factors benefit from relational interventions that address cognitive, emotional, and social contributors to violent behavior. For instance, research analyzing firearm-related violence reveals that risk factors for repeated violent offending may be mitigated through community-based and dialogic interventions that foster empathy, self-reflection, and connections with pro-social networks (Reitz et al., 2022). Restorative justice therefore contributes to desistance not only through emotional engagement but also by addressing social structures that influence long-term behavioral trajectories.

Community-level effects constitute another key area of empirical analysis. Restorative justice, particularly in violent crime contexts, often involves community representatives, family members, and other stakeholders whose involvement can strengthen social cohesion and reduce collective trauma. Studies examining the role of information technologies in addressing violence against women reveal that restorative processes supported by digital tools can enhance accountability, increase accessibility, and support community-based prevention strategies (Przeszlowski et al., 2023). Community reintegration programs, including those for child perpetrators of homicide or other severe offenses, also demonstrate the importance of communal involvement in supporting offender reintegration and preventing stigmatization, findings reflected in Indonesian research on child criminal responsibility (Saragih et al., 2024). Other empirical work examining violent theft and similar crimes shows that communities that participate in restorative dialogues experience enhanced trust in justice institutions and greater collective capacity to prevent future harm (Hasan et al., 2024). These insights illustrate how restorative justice not only addresses individual-level relationships but also contributes to broader social healing and resilience.

Comparative analyses of program success factors provide important insights into why restorative justice yields positive outcomes in some violent crime cases but produces mixed or limited effects in others. One of the most widely supported findings concerns the role of facilitator expertise. Studies reveal that skilled facilitators—those trained in trauma-informed practice, conflict resolution, and culturally responsive communication—are essential for ensuring emotional safety, managing power dynamics, and guiding productive dialogue. Inadequate facilitation can cause retraumatization or undermine victim trust, an issue highlighted in analyses of restorative justice in contexts involving gender-based violence, where poorly managed sessions risk reinforcing patriarchal power structures (Lažetić, 2025). Cultural integration is also crucial, as restorative justice practices must align with local norms, values, and relational structures. Evaluations of restorative interventions in Indonesian domestic violence cases show that culturally grounded processes, supported by community leaders and aligned with local expectations, are more effective in achieving sustainable outcomes (Purba & Koswara, 2023). International policy analyses further emphasize the importance of aligning restorative frameworks with broader justice reforms, ensuring that restorative practices remain legitimate and ethically grounded (Keenan & Zinsstag, 2022).

Legal frameworks also strongly influence program effectiveness. Jurisdictions that have developed clear policies governing restorative justice—particularly for serious violent crimes—tend to implement more consistent, ethically sound, and victim-centered practices. For example, prosecutorial guidelines for the protection of women and children in Indonesia establish structured procedures for restorative conferencing in violent cases, ensuring legal oversight and participant safety (Zurnetti et al., 2024). Studies examining youth violence and policing further show that restorative policing models supported by legal policy can enhance dialogue, reduce stigma, and increase community trust (Hobson et al., 2022). Conversely, weak or ambiguous legal frameworks may lead to inconsistent application or misuse of restorative principles, especially in cases where restorative settlements are prioritized over victim safety or justice.

Voluntary participation is another critical success factor emphasized across empirical studies. Restorative justice processes that coerce or pressure victims undermine core principles of autonomy and informed consent, particularly in cases involving intimate or gender-based violence. Research exploring victim willingness to meet offenders demonstrates that victims' emotional readiness and sense of safety directly influence positive outcomes, with coercive or unprepared participation leading to negative psychological effects (Batchelor, 2023). Preparation processes, including pre-meeting counseling, trauma assessment, and structured emotional support, are consistently identified as essential components of effective restorative programs. Empirical evaluations of restorative interventions in sexual violence and domestic violence contexts emphasize that proper preparation reduces risk of retraumatization, enhances participant satisfaction, and fosters meaningful dialogue (Alifah, 2025). Without these preparatory steps, restorative processes may fail to achieve intended goals or may inadvertently harm participants.

Despite the growing evidence supporting restorative justice in violent crime contexts, the literature also presents contradictory findings and methodological limitations. Some studies note that restorative justice may be inappropriate in certain high-risk situations, especially where significant power disparities or ongoing threats exist. Research on gender-based violence, for instance, raises concerns that restorative processes may unintentionally reinforce abusive dynamics if not implemented with rigorous safeguards (Lažetić, 2025). Methodologically, many empirical studies rely on small sample sizes, qualitative self-reports, or case-specific evaluations, making it difficult to generalize findings across populations. Recidivism studies often face challenges in controlling for variables such as socioeconomic status, prior convictions, and access to support networks, factors that complicate interpretations of restorative program effectiveness. In addition, cross-cultural variability in restorative practices means that interventions successful in one context may not translate effectively to another without adaptation. Studies exploring digital evidence of violent crime also highlight how new forms of violence create complexities that traditional restorative models were not designed to address (Birze et al., 2022). These limitations underscore the need for more rigorous, longitudinal, and cross-cultural research to clarify when and how restorative justice is most effective in cases of violent crime.

Taken together, empirical findings demonstrate that restorative justice offers significant potential for promoting healing, accountability, and community resilience in violent crime contexts. However, its effectiveness depends heavily on careful implementation, cultural and legal integration, and an awareness of both the strengths and limitations identified by contemporary research.

5. Conclusion

Restorative justice has emerged as a vital and increasingly influential framework for addressing violent crime, offering a profound shift from traditional retributive approaches toward more relational, healing-centered, and community-engaged models of justice. The evidence reviewed across the preceding sections demonstrates that restorative justice is not merely an alternative to the punitive paradigm but a comprehensive approach capable of addressing the complex emotional, psychological, and social dimensions of harm that violent crime produces. By prioritizing dialogue, acknowledgment, accountability, and relational repair, restorative justice provides pathways for healing that conventional systems rarely facilitate. This conclusion synthesizes the key insights of the narrative review, highlighting the conceptual strengths of restorative justice, its demonstrated impacts on victims and offenders, its contributions to community resilience, and the essential considerations required for ethical and effective implementation.

One of the most significant contributions of restorative justice lies in its capacity to re-center victims in the justice process. Traditional criminal systems often marginalize victims, reducing them to witnesses while focusing on the legal relationship between the state and the offender. Restorative justice reverses this logic by giving victims space to articulate their experiences, express their emotions, and participate actively in defining justice. Victims of violent crime frequently report that restorative encounters provide opportunities for emotional release, closure, and empowerment, enabling them to regain control after experiences that often left them feeling powerless. This victim-centered approach aligns justice more closely with the psychological and emotional needs of individuals and communities affected by violence.

Restorative justice also holds substantial significance for offenders, who are encouraged—sometimes for the first time—to understand the real impact of their actions. Unlike punitive models that focus primarily on punishment, restorative justice fosters active accountability. Offenders must confront the human consequences of their behavior, listen to the voices of those

they harmed, and take steps toward making amends. These experiences can be transformative, contributing to moral development, empathy, and long-term behavioral change. For violent offenders, whose actions often stem from a complex interplay of personal, relational, and social factors, these processes can disrupt entrenched patterns of harm in ways that incarceration alone cannot achieve.

At the community level, restorative justice promotes reconciliation, strengthens social bonds, and enhances collective capacity to prevent future harm. Violent crime rarely affects only those directly involved; entire communities often experience fear, trauma, and broken trust. Restorative practices—whether circles, conferences, or community reparative boards—invite community members to participate in addressing the underlying causes of violence, supporting both victims and offenders, and rebuilding relationships. This collective involvement reinforces social cohesion and fosters a sense of shared responsibility, reducing the isolation and fragmentation that violent crime frequently produces.

Despite its many strengths, restorative justice in violent crime contexts also presents significant challenges. Implementing restorative justice in cases involving severe harm requires careful attention to safety, voluntariness, and trauma-informed practice. Power imbalances—particularly in cases of domestic violence, sexual violence, or culturally embedded forms of oppression—must be identified and addressed to prevent coercion or re-victimization. Skilled facilitators, robust screening processes, and structured preparation are essential to ensuring that restorative encounters are supportive rather than harmful. The complexity of violent crime means that restorative justice cannot be applied indiscriminately; it requires tailored approaches that reflect the needs, histories, and emotional conditions of all participants.

Another important consideration is the integration of restorative justice within legal and policy frameworks. Restorative processes must operate within structures that safeguard participants' rights and ensure accountability. When restorative justice is implemented without adequate legal grounding or oversight, it risks being misused or misinterpreted, especially in contexts where informal pressures may prioritize social harmony over individual safety. Conversely, legal systems that incorporate restorative principles with clarity and consistency can create environments in which these models can flourish. Hybrid approaches that blend restorative interventions with traditional justice processes offer promising avenues for balancing relational accountability with formal protections.

The empirical literature shows considerable promise but also reveals gaps that warrant further investigation. Many studies highlight positive outcomes for victims, offenders, and communities, yet methodological limitations—such as small samples, context-specific designs, and limited longitudinal follow-up—complicate efforts to generalize findings. Violent crime encompasses a wide spectrum of behaviors and contexts, and what works for one type of harm may not work for another. Future research must therefore explore restorative justice across diverse cultural, structural, and relational environments while employing rigorous methodologies capable of assessing long-term effects.

Additionally, emerging forms of violence—including those mediated by digital technologies—present new challenges and ethical questions that restorative justice must address. As social environments change, restorative models will require adaptation to remain relevant and effective. This includes developing trauma-informed and culturally sensitive practices that reflect evolving understandings of violence, harm, and justice.

Despite these challenges, restorative justice offers a compelling vision for the future of justice responses to violent crime. Its holistic approach aligns with growing global recognition that punishment alone cannot address the deep and lasting consequences of violence. By emphasizing relational repair, emotional healing, and community involvement, restorative justice responds to violence not simply as a legal violation but as a social wound requiring collective care.

In conclusion, restorative justice represents a transformative paradigm for addressing violent crime. Its ability to meet the emotional needs of victims, foster accountability among offenders, and strengthen community resilience positions it as a powerful complement to traditional justice systems. Effective implementation demands careful attention to safety, ethics, and cultural context, but when these conditions are met, restorative justice can contribute to more humane, meaningful, and sustainable forms of justice. As societies continue to grapple with the complexities of violence, restorative justice offers a path forward that honors the humanity of all involved and promotes healing at individual, relational, and community levels.

Ethical Considerations

All procedures performed in this study were under the ethical standards.

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Conflict of Interest

The authors report no conflict of interest.

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