

# Face-to-face Restorative Justice Conferences are cost-effective in reducing reoffending and increasing victim satisfaction



*Victims taking part in face-to-face RJC's suffer less from post traumatic stress symptoms*

#### **What is the aim of this review?**

This Campbell systematic review examines the effectiveness of face-to-face Restorative Justice Conferences on repeat offending and victim satisfaction. The systematic review includes ten studies.

**Face-to-face Restorative Justice Conferences (RJC's) between offenders and victims have a modest but highly cost-effective impact on reoffending. Victims' satisfaction with the handling of their cases is consistently higher among those who attend RJC's, compared to those dealt with solely by standard criminal justice processes, usually the courts.**

#### **What is this review about?**

Restorative justice approaches attempt to repair the harms caused by a crime rather than harming the offender. This review covers face-to-face RJC's in which the offender meets the victims of the crime to discuss the offence and its consequences.

During face-to-face RJC's participants describe how they are connected to the crime, victims describe the harm caused, and everyone – including the offender – talks about how the harm might be repaired.

This review compares the effects of face-to-face Restorative Justice Conferencing with standard criminal justice alone on (a) repeat offending for a two-year period after the disposal of the case and (b) measures of victim satisfaction.

#### **What studies are included?**

Included studies have all the following characteristics: (1) a randomized design to test the effects of face-to-face RJC's compared with standard criminal justice alone; (2) a report on face-to-face RJC's between at least one victim of a crime and at least one of the offenders involved; (3) provide data on the frequency of convictions or re-arrest for two years after the disposal of the case in a way which allows calculation of the effects of both treatments; and (4) published in English after 1994.

Ten eligible studies were identified from the United Kingdom (7), Australia (2), and the USA



### How up-to-date is this review?

The search was completed in 2012. This Campbell Systematic Review was published on 1 November 2013.

### What is the Campbell Collaboration?

The Campbell Collaboration is an international, voluntary, non-profit research network that publishes systematic reviews. We summarise and evaluate the quality of evidence about programmes in the social and behavioural sciences. Our aim is to help people make better choices and better policy decisions.

### About this summary

This summary was written by Simon Goudie (Campbell Collaboration). This PLS is based on Campbell Systematic Review 2013:12 *Restorative Justice Conferencing (RJC) Using Face-to-Face Meetings of Offenders and Victims: Effects on Offender Recidivism and Victim Satisfaction. A Systematic Review* by Heather Strang, Lawrence W. Sherman, Evan Mayo-Wilson, Daniel Woods, and Barak Ariel (10.4073/csr.2013.12). Tanya Kristiansen (Campbell Collaboration) did the layout and copy-editing of the summary. Financial support from the American Institutes for Research for the production of this summary is gratefully acknowledged.



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(1). Different experiments randomly assigned cases to face-to-face RJC; some occurred at pre-trial diversion from prosecution, some occurred after conviction prior to sentencing, and others after offenders had been jailed or were on probation. The eligible studies included violent crime and property crime, as well as both youth and adult offenders.

### How effective are face-to-face RJC interventions?

The average effect of the ten studies indicated that face-to-face RJC resulted in offenders committing significantly less crime than their counterparts randomly assigned to standard criminal justice alone. The effect of RJC on violent crime is larger than its effects on property crime.

For victims, again comparing those whose cases were assigned to RJC with those assigned to standard criminal justice, those taking part in face-to-face RJC express higher levels of satisfaction with the handling of their cases, are more likely to receive an apology from offenders and rate these apologies as sincere, be less inclined to want to seek revenge, and suffer less from post traumatic stress symptoms.

### What are the implications of this review for policy makers and decision makers?

Compared with standard criminal justice, usually through the courts, face-to-face RJC reduce the frequency of subsequent crimes among offenders who are willing to take part in these programmes and whose victims are also willing to consent to RJC.

The effects of face-to-face RJC on the frequency of subsequent offending are strongest when these programmes are in addition to conventional justice procedures. The use of face-to-face RJC appears to be highly cost effective: data from the seven UK experiments indicates that the value of benefits of averted crimes is eight times the cost of delivering RJC.

### What are the research implications of this review?

Recruitment and retention for face-to-face RJC among victims and offenders requires skill and more attention is needed about how to increase uptake.