

Restorative Justice in Child Victims: A Review of the Empirical Evidence

Justicia restaurativa en menores víctimas:
Una revisión de la evidencia empírica

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abstract

This study is a review of publications which have presented empirical results on the psychological outcomes of restorative justice in child victims. Children constitute one of the most victimised groups in society, and they are also at a heightened risk of secondary victimisation within the legal system. Few studies to date have assessed the possible benefits of the application of restorative processes to judicial intervention in these cases. The results presented here show that research in this area is still in its infancy. However, although caution is in order, the programs carried out so far indicate that children can benefit greatly from processes of restorative justice and from a philosophy based on its principles which supports the participation of children and youths in the system.

keywords

Children; restorative justice; victimology; developmental victimology.

resumen

El objetivo del presente estudio ha sido llevar a cabo una revisión de aquellas publicaciones que han obtenido resultados empíricos sobre las consecuencias psicológicas de la justicia restaurativa en menores víctimas. Los niños y niñas son uno de los colectivos más victimizado de la sociedad, a lo que hay que añadir el alto riesgo de victimización secundaria que puede darse por parte del sistema judicial. Sin embargo escasos trabajos han analizado los beneficios que puede suponer la aplicación de procesos restaurativos a la intervención judicial con estos casos. Si bien debemos ser cautos, dado que los resultados obtenidos muestran que la investigación en este ámbito debe todavía avanzar mucho, los programas existentes y evaluados hasta el momento indican que los menores pueden beneficiarse enormemente de los procesos de justicia restaurativa y de una filosofía de trabajo basada en sus principios, que apoya la participación de menores en el sistema.

palabras clave

Infancia; justicia restaurativa; victimología; victimología del desarrollo.

Restorative Justice in Child Victims: A Review of the Evidence

The impact of victimisation on children and youths is far greater than its immediate and visible effects. Victimisation affects not only the particular child and his/her relationship with other family members, but also society as a whole (Finkelhor, 2008). The experience of violence in childhood is a major source of problems throughout the victim's lifetime (Kendall-Tackett, 2013), and a civil society that does not promote the positive development of its children in a safe, supportive environment may be irreparably compromised (Lerner, 2000).

The severe psychological consequences that a child may present after the experience of victimisation may well be compounded by the risk of secondary victimisation –that is, victimisation due to professional intervention. Concern about the revictimisation of children in the judicial system is not new; for years now professionals have been warned about the risks, especially in cases where the victim is obliged to appear in court (see the classic studies of De Francis 1969, and Libai 1969).

Many children and youths have suffered the consequences of malpractice by members of the judicial system or of evaluation procedures which have ignored their special needs as vulnerable witnesses or victims at a stage of development that requires proper and specific treatment (Whitcomb, 2003). All too often, these young people are not provided with psychological treatment after victimisation out of a fear that the therapy may contaminate their testimony at trial. This, in addition to the snail-like pace of the traditional justice system, increases the risk that the adverse consequences of victimisation may mark them for life (Fortin, 2009). These negative experiences of contact with the justice system have been called 'critogenic harms', or effects caused by law (Gutheil, Bursztajn, Brodsky, & Strasburger, 2000), and should be avoided at all costs, since the victim's relationship with the legal system has important implications for their process of recovery. According to Dancig-Rosenberg (2008), for the victims, the court represents society and its response to their needs has important implications for their subsequent social reintegration. This is especially so in the case of child victims.

In this context, restorative justice represents forward thinking of how courts can effectively help those who need services as well as justice, but also it represents a response to dissatisfactions with the justice system. It is an alternative method for addressing conflict that provides an opportunity to validate the victims' needs by the giving of their voice to the process. Restorative justice interventions include a number of different practices such as victim-offender mediation (VOM) or family group conferencing (FGC). The focus is not only the offender, the offence and the punishment imposed, but now includes the victim and the community, and especially the damage that they have suffered.

The emphasis, therefore, is on the repair and resolution of the damage caused (see Daly & Immarrigeon, 1998). This is especially positive for child victims in the welfare system in which the punishment of the perpetrator –in many cases a person in their immediate environment, for whom they feel affection– does not relieve the pain of the victimisation but often compounds it because of a feeling of being responsible for the punishment (Fortin, 2009). What is more, the children most likely to be involved in court proceedings and under the greatest pressure to make statements are victims of sex crimes and the more severe forms of abuse. The emotional vulnerability of these children is a reality that is not always taken into account in traditional justice system (Whitcomb, 1992).

But restorative justice is a new perspective in the judicial system. At this stage in its development, it requires empirical evidence to show that its interventions are successful and actually achieve their goal of repairing the damage caused by crime and preventing future harm, as happens in other disciplines (McNeece & Thyer, 2004).

There is a significant body of theory in the field of restorative justice regarding offenders (see Bonta, Jesseman, Rugge, & Cormier, 2006) and especially in the area of juvenile justice (see Livingstone, Macdonald, & Carr, 2013). Restorative justice has demonstrated its value; it reduces recidivism and increases the social reintegration of offenders, minimising the stigma and promoting the recognition of responsibility towards the victim. However, the literature on the potential positive effects of restorative justice on victims remains scarce.

Poulson (2003) carried out a review of seven different articles from four different countries, four of which used VOM programmes and the other three FGC programmes. The study demonstrated the superiority of the process of restorative justice over the system of retributive justice with regard to victims' satisfaction and emotional state, and their sense of security, justice and forgiveness. In turn, the effects on the offender also indicate greater satisfaction and regret.

The review by Umbreit, Coates and Vos (2004) of 50 mediation processes relating to five countries presented similar results. The high level of satisfaction of victims and victimisers, the impression reported by both parties that the process had been fair, the agreement on the restitution, the type of sanction imposed on the offender and the lower rates of recidivism are all results that support and validate its use.

In the same vein, one of the few meta-analyses in the field of restorative justice (Latimer, Dowden, & Muise, 2005) showed that the 35 restorative justice programmes reviewed (eight conferencing processes and 27 VOM) were more effective than the retributive justice system in generating greater victim

and offender satisfaction, greater compliance with the agreed restitution, and a lower rate of recidivism.

In addition to the subjective satisfaction that victims express after these processes, Angel (2005) showed that the methods of restorative justice in adult victims are more effective in reducing post-trauma symptoms than the retributive justice system, at least in victims of robberies and burglaries. In that study, victims involved in a restorative justice process presented improvements in their psychological state similar to those obtained with cognitive behavioural therapy, which today represents the most effective form of psychological intervention with victims of violence (Foa, Keane, Friedman, & Cohen, 2009).

Similarly, in a review of 36 studies carried out between 1986 and 2005 of the effectiveness of restorative justice in reducing recidivism among offenders and improving recovery among the victims, Sherman & Strang (2007) reported positive results. They conclude that the evidence from randomised and non-randomised control trials and from studies of victims' opinions or views are consistent in showing a significant reduction in the damage caused.

The results of all these reviews suggest that restorative justice processes have a positive effect on many of the difficulties experienced by victims (see also, the book based on qualitative interviews with victims of violent crime by Van Camp, 2014). However, the idealised vision of restorative justice as the solution to all the problems created by the participation of the victim in legal proceedings has been challenged by more critical analyses and results, which also warn of the risks (see Braithwaite 1999, or the more recent reviews by Kenney & Clairmont, 2009, and Choi, Bazemore, & Gilbert, 2012). In general, child victims have not received a great deal of attention from theorists in this field.

In view of the relative scarcity of research in this area, in this paper we aim to conduct a review of previous studies that have published empirical results on the psychological outcomes of restorative justice in child victims, regarding the courts and the welfare system. Our analysis will focus on the restorative interventions that have demonstrated their effectiveness in improving the emotional state of child victims. The present review aims to provide guidance for practitioners regarding the possibility of implementing restorative practices in this age group, above all in the context of the welfare system. We hope to help to improve current practices in these cases, and to reduce the risk that the professional care provided to child victims will have adverse outcomes.

This paper is divided into several parts. First it focuses on those studies that have analysed the effects of restorative justice on child victims. The last part presents the conclusions regarding this area of study. Social and professional implications derived from the article are also discussed in the last section.

Research evidence: What we know about the effects of restorative justice on victims?

New Zealand was the first country to include child victims in restorative justice processes. FGCs were introduced in cases of juvenile justice and child protection in 1989 as an alternative to legal proceedings. Australia, Canada and the US followed suit, and projects like the Hollow Water Community Holistic Circle Healing programme, the Family Group Decision-Making Project (e.g., Gal, 2006; 2011; Sheets et al., 2008) and Reintegrative Shaming Experiments (RISE) (Gal & Moyal, 2011) showed positive results. In Israel, the programme Kedem also recorded positive results (Shachaf-Friedman, & Timor, 2008). Table 1 shows a summary of these studies.

In New Zealand, Maxwell et al. (2004) presented a prospective study in which interviews were conducted with 100 victims within the young justice system. The authors concluded that of the 58 victims who attended the conferences including children and adults (although age is not specified in the study) 71% reported that their needs had been covered during the conference and 86% that they had had the opportunity to say what they wanted. However, around half also stated that they did not feel included in the decisions that were made; they doubted that the offender's apologies were sincere or that he or she had understood the impact of the victimisation.

Daly et al. carried out a study of the results of 89 conferences held by the South Australia Juvenile Justice (SAJJ) including child victims between 1998 and 1999. They showed that conferences can have positive effects and outcomes for victims, but that the improvements may be modest and may not occur in most cases (Daly, 2005). For this reason, the author advocates comparative studies of restorative processes and the traditional justice system in order to assess the effects of restorative justice from a broader perspective. Daly's contribution to the Sexual Assault Archival Study (SAAS, 2006) was the first paper to compare the advantages and disadvantages of restorative conferencing processes versus the involvement of victims in the retributive justice system, in 385 cases of sexual offences which included children among other victims.

One of the main public criticisms of restorative justice in this type of crime is its alleged lenience with regard to the offender, and its supposed reinforcement of the belief that violence may be a valid option that does not have consequences (see Roberts & Stalans, 2004). Indeed, the application of the principles of restorative justice in these cases has been defined by some as cheap justice. However, Daly and her team answered these criticisms in a series of studies in which they demonstrated that the conferencing process provides the highest degree of justice to victims of all ages. After a thorough analysis, they concluded that in these cases the aggressor is more likely to admit to the offen-

ce and receive a penalty, while in many cases that are submitted to the principles of retributive justice, after numerous court hearings, the victim learns that the case has been dismissed or the charges against the aggressor have been dropped for lack of evidence (see Daly, Bouhours, Curtis-Fawley, Weber, & Scholl, 2007).

In Canada, Pennell and Burford (2000) concluded from studies conducted in 32 families with a total of 91 children that restorative conferencing is effective in reducing domestic violence and in promoting the welfare of its participants. Both the aggressors (usually the biological parents) and the child victims expressed their satisfaction with the results at the end of the programme. Two-thirds of family members stated that the family situation had improved as a result of the process, and this proportion rose to 85% when the question was posed specifically to victims and aggressors. While children under the age of 12 were not present during the restorative process, they were also able to air their views and their desires for the future through letters that were read during the process, or by appointing a representative to transmit their opinions. These children presented significant improvements in their emotional state after the process in comparison with a control group (Burford & Pennell, 1998). From their qualitative findings, Burford, Pennell, and Edwards (2011) have also showed the benefits of involving families in decision making to develop a plan for presenting in court even when children are removed on an involuntary and emergency basis. Although considerable effort is required by professionals to collaborate around the principles of family engagement, the authors defend the benefits of the restorative justice perspective when working in the child welfare system.

Based on data from the RISE experiments, Gal and Moyal (2011) compared 36 children and 196 adult victims of various crimes and found that restorative conferences were significantly more satisfying than courts for both children and adults. The authors also observed an interaction between conferencing and age group, in that juvenile victims benefited less from conferences than adults; however, the young victims were mainly harmed by violence, while the adult victims sub-group was mainly harmed through property crimes. Thus, the authors concluded that the correlation between the level of psychological and physical harm caused by different crimes should be explored and that the satisfaction of both adult and young victims with conferences should be assessed before any conclusions regarding the value of these processes could be reached. They also noted that professionals need specialised training to deal with child victims and should bear in mind the special needs of this group before considering restorative processes.

Sheets et al. (2008) collected survey data from families whose child had been removed by child welfare authorities due to abuse or neglect, using the Texas online case management system, IMPACT (Information Management Protecting Adults and Children through Technology). The treatment group

consisted of 468 cases having a family conference within the first 180 days of removal. The control group consisted of 3,598 families having standard practice or Permanency Planning Team meetings. Findings indicated that both parents and relatives were more satisfied with conferences than with Permanency Planning Team meetings, by indicating greater feelings of empowerment, and a greater sense of what was expected of them among others. In addition, whether placed in foster or relative care, the children whose families participated in FGC were less anxious than children from families experiencing traditional services.

The qualitative study of the *Kedem* family conference programme in Israel (Shachaf-Friedman & Timor, 2008) involved a small sample of seven victims including two children. The results exemplify the high degree of satisfaction, the enhancement of feelings of respect, justice and empowerment, and the sense of control reported by most victims involved in the process of restorative justice. Despite the positive results, however, the authors stress the need to assess the expectations and interests of victims prior to their participation in the conferencing programme, since these expectations have an important influence on the results; the authors conclude that not all victims feel that they have benefited from these processes, and that it is the responsibility of the professionals to decide who should and who should not participate.

Discussion

In light of the above findings the few studies that have assessed the advisability of the involvement of children in restorative justice programs (though usually not as the primary focus of their research) have argued in favour of their participation. The reports express both high satisfaction with the process and improvements in the children's emotional well-being. Other authors have also defend the use of FGC or family meetings from a theoretical perspective, although they also admit that more research is needed to fully explore how effective these programs are in supporting families to make plans that allow children to be safely cared for by their own families (Evans, 2011). For children who have suffered domestic violence, empowerment is probably one of the main benefits of restorative justice; it allows them to explain what happened, and the aggressor's acknowledgement of the offence gives credence to their account. In fact, perhaps contrary to expectations, child victims of sexual abuse show the highest level of satisfaction with restorative justice, since the process can help to break down the victim's feelings of isolation, guilt, and stigmatisation (Daly, 2006).

Children are likely to be the main protagonists in restorative justice processes, since research has shown their high vulnerability to violence at both

Table 1. Descriptive summary of the studies reviewed.

	Authors (year)	Country	N	Age of the sample	Type of victimization	Variables	Assessment instruments	Restorative justice	Outcomes
1	Maxwell et al. (2004)	New Zealand	100 (58 involved in RJ)	14 of the victims were under 20 years old	n.s.	Victim's satisfaction with their participation in the restorative program.	Victims' reports to the professionals involved in the restorative justice program.	FGC	Victims felt they were treated with respect (90%); they felt they had the opportunity to say what they wanted (86%); they had a chance to explain the effect of the offending (83%); their needs were met (71%). Eighty-one percent felt better after the conference.
2	Daly (2006); Daly et al. (2007)	Australia	385 (118 involved in RJ)	Mean age of 8.6 – 13 years old.	Sexual offence.	Indirect benefits of conference versus court cases for the victims.	Files of the cases.	C	Almost all conferences were finalized by an admission to a sexual offence (94%); conference processes were faster than court (a median of 2.5 months).
3	Pennell & Burford (2000)	Canada	32 families involved in RJ (91 children)	Children were under the age of 18 years.	Family violence.	Protection of child and adult family members and unification of the family group.	Follow-up interviews with family group members and reviews of child protective services' files for the presence of indicators of child maltreatment and adult abuse.	FGDM	Two thirds (76) of the interviewees said the family was 'better off' because of the conference. The mean number of maltreatment events per family decreased from 7.28 (SD = 5.40) before the conference to 3.66 (SD = 4.51) after it.

Authors (year)	Country	N	Age of the sample	Type of victimization	Variables	Assessment instruments	Restorative justice	Outcomes
4 Gal & Moyal (2011)	Australia	36 children involved in RJ	Under the age of 18 years.	Property crimes and violent crimes.	The effect of conferencing on victims' overall satisfaction.	An ad hoc summated satisfaction scale ranging from 0, least satisfied, to 32, most satisfied.	C	Conferences made victims slightly, and insignificantly, less satisfied compared with courts (Cohen's $d = -0.28$, $p = 0.406$).
5 Sheets et al. (2009)	Unites States	468 families experiencing a removal and involved in RJ	n.s.	n.s.	Family satisfaction with the intervention and child well-being.	Survey data on client satisfaction for parents and relatives, and a telephone interview for the children's caregivers (relatives or foster parents) 3–6 months post conference regarding child well-being.	FGDM	Both parents and relatives felt more empowered, $F(1,1066)=18.8$, $p<.001$, had a clearer sense of what was expected of them, $F(1,1066)=14.3$, $p<.001$ and were better able to identify issues in the family plan of service, $F(1,1066)=25.4$, $p<.001$ as a result of having participated in a FGDM conference. The children whose families participated in FGDM were less anxious than children from families experiencing traditional services, $F(1,83)=3.56$, $p<.065$, though the effect is marginal.

Authors (year)	Country	N	Age of the sample	Type of victimization	Variables	Assessment instruments	Restorative justice	Outcomes
6 Shachaf-Friedman & Timor (2008)	Israel	7 victims who participated in the FGC Kedom program (2 children)	The two children had 14 and 16 years old.	n.s.	Victims thoughts and feelings about the FGC program.	In-depth telephone interviews and a semi-structured questionnaire used in previous studies (Umbreit & Ferrello, 1997).	FGC	Overall, the findings indicate that most of the participants felt satisfaction, mutual respect, and a sense of just process and outcomes. In these cases, the participants reported that they felt their needs and expectations had been met. The same participants also indicated empowerment, sense of control, and less fear prior to the process.

n.s.: not specified

Restorative justice: FGC: family group conference, C: conference, FGDM: family group decision making conferences

the individual (Finkelhor, Turner, Ormrod, & Hamby, 2009) and the mass level (Parmar, Roseman, Siegrist, & Sowa, 2010). In turn, the law provides that children have the right to be heard and that their wishes as victims should be taken into account; they should choose whether or not to participate in the judicial process and they also decide the extent of their involvement. Their interests are the primary concern at all times. However, these rights are not frequently respected in the traditional justice system. Restorative justice emerges as a new approach that respects these rights and includes a number of strategies or initiatives that might be expected to alleviate the stress caused by children's involvement in the justice system.

Professionals should not forget that children's participation in the justice system and their right to testify are provided for by the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC)¹, which increases their perception of control and empowerment in a process in which they (especially if they are very young) are otherwise passive actors (Zehr, 1990). And since the CRC also stipulates that the authorities are obliged act to safeguard the interests of the child,² the principles of restorative justice emerge as an appropriate means to act on these interests. The same rights-based restorative justice principles have been applied to the juvenile justice system (Moore & Mitchell, 2009). Furthermore, the right to be heard and to express views and concerns, the right to effective assistance and the right to reparation are among the guidelines on justice in matters involving child victims and witnesses of crime adopted by the UN Economic and Social Council in its Resolution 2005/20 of 22 July 2005. In the process of traditional justice, especially in the field of criminal justice, these recommendations and guidelines may not be appropriately applied. Restorative justice procedures, on the other hand, uphold these guidelines and respect the rights of the child and are themselves included in Article 30 ('Restorative justice measures') of the Model Law on Justice in Matters Involving Child Victims and Witnesses of Crime, passed by UNICEF in Vienna in 2009. So, after an experience of victimisation, children may actively participate in the court proceedings or at

1 Art. 12.1. 'States Parties shall assure to the child who is capable of forming his or her own views the right to express those views freely in all matters affecting the child, the views of the child being given due weight in accordance with the age and maturity of the child'.

Art. 12.2. 'For this purpose, the child shall in particular be provided the opportunity to be heard in any judicial and administrative proceedings affecting the child, either directly, or through a representative or an appropriate body, in a manner consistent with the procedural rules of national law'.

2 Art. 3.1. 'In all actions concerning children, whether undertaken by public or private social welfare institutions, courts of law, administrative authorities or legislative bodies, the best interests of the child shall be a primary consideration'.

least, decide whether or not they wish to take part. The child's age and alleged immaturity, then, should not be a determining factor or a justification for prohibiting their participation in these processes.

At this stage, the results are preliminary and a great deal of research remains to be done. Clearly, caution is in order. Nevertheless, the programmes evaluated so far indicate that children can benefit enormously from restorative justice processes (Daly & Curtis-Fawley, 2006) and from a working philosophy based on its principles which supports their participation in the system. The first great strength of restorative justice processes is that they provide more information to the child, increasing their perception of being in control of the situation and reducing the risk of psychological problems. In turn, increasing the child's participation throughout the process gives them a voice and at the same time increases their sense of empowerment, self-worth, and self-esteem. The flexibility and informality of the setting in comparison with the court system reduces the risk of secondary victimisation, since it reduces the perceived threat, is easier to comprehend, and is better suited to the child's needs and capabilities. Furthermore, the option of meeting the aggressor inside a safe environment, hearing his or her explanations, apologies, and acceptance of responsibility, is likely to enhance the victim's feeling of security; it may help to overcome feelings of anger and fear and alleviate post-traumatic symptoms. Finally, expressing one's reactions to victimisation and the associated pain, being able to express one's emotions to people of reference, and receiving their support reduces feelings of guilt and restores trust in others (Daly, 2006; Gal, 2011). In cases of domestic violence especially this means that different family members do not perceive their family ties as being under threat, and that the relationship between the victim and the victimiser can be rebuilt if desired; indeed, this has been already demonstrated (Daly & Curtis-Fawley, 2006).

As we noted above, it is mainly due to sexual offences that children and youths come into contact with the justice system. Nonetheless, restorative justice has only rarely been applied in these situations, or in those involving aggression between members of the same family) and, especially from feminist positions, its principles have been considered unsuitable for offences of this kind (see Cossins, 2008). The upshot is that children have not benefited from the potential advantages of restorative justice in the areas of crime in which they are particularly vulnerable. The argument is that sexual and other serious offences must be treated by the court system so that the grave violation of social norms can be resolved by a judge; however, the truth is that very few crimes of this type actually reach the courts and still fewer end with a conviction and effective punishment (for a review of arguments both for and against the application of restorative justice for these crimes, see Daly & Stubbs, 2006). Furthermore, in crimes against children, the social requirement of sentencing and punishment

is not usually shared by their victims, who merely want a fair trial and emotional and material restitution for themselves rather than a punishment for the offender (Fortin, 2009). Whatever the case, restorative justice processes should be commensurate to the gravity of the offence; its values are certainly not irreconcilable with punishment, provided that this punishment is not seen as an end in itself (Zehr, 1990).

Social and professional implications

For the potential benefits of restorative justice to become tangible, the conditions in which the process takes place must be carefully nurtured. Its application requires great ability and skill on the part of the professionals, since the standard processes of restorative justice are not a valid response when children are involved. The principle of the indivisibility of rights³, which defends the need to respect all rights equally is applicable in the field of child victims: in this case, the rights at stake are those of participating in the justice system and of receiving protection under it. The simplistic, classical resort of pitting children's needs against children's rights so as to exclude children in restorative processes should be dismissed (Nixon, 2007). Particular attention should be paid to preparing the victim (Shachaf-Friedman & Timor, 2008) and to ensuring that there is no pressure from family members or professionals on the child to participate, or to see or forgive the offender, if he or she does not wish to do so (Gal, 2006).

The European Directive 2012/29/EU⁴ establishes minimum standards on the rights, support and protection of victims of crime applicable in the Member States. These standards aim to strength the rights and protection of victims, in particular in criminal proceedings. In this context, practitioners should be particularly careful in dealing with cases in which child victims are involved. Even when the use of restorative justice can be of great benefit to the victims, such services need to adopt safeguards to prevent secondary victimization, intimidation or retaliation, especially against child victims. In this sense, the age, maturity or intellectual capacity of the victim, should be taken into consideration in referring a case to the restorative justice services and in conducting a restorative justice process. At the same time, the Directive firmly establishes

3 Proclamation of Teheran, Final Act of the International Conference on Human Rights, Teheran, 22 April to 13 May 1968, U.N. Doc. A/CONF. 32/41 at 3 (1968).

4 Directive 2012/29/EU of the European Parliament and of the Council of 25 October 2012 establishing minimum standards on the rights, support and protection of victims of crime, and replacing Council Framework Decision 2001/220/JHA.

that children's rights must be respected during the whole process and that practitioners need to take into account children's ability to form their own views and their right to be heard in criminal proceedings. Consequently, individual assessments by trained practitioners should be carried out to identify children's vulnerabilities and capacities to participate in a restorative justice process.

It is not always necessary for the child to be physically present in the restorative process. The child may prefer decisions regarding the offender to be taken by a neutral adult as a disinterested party, and then to be informed of what happened (Lawrence, 2003). However, it is extremely important to listen closely to the story of the child in his or her own words, even if there are adults present who can explain what happened more clearly or in greater detail; it has been shown that providing this story is crucial to reducing feelings of guilt (Gal, 2011). Though the classical legal setting is intimidating for child victims who have to make statements (Morgan & Zedner, 1992), the link they establish with the professionals and the trust they build up can reduce its traumatic impact, and in fact giving testimony has not been associated with an increased level of psychological distress in these children (Berliner & Conte, 1995). The important thing is to listen to what the child wants and to give them the chance to make decisions, so that they can begin to feel a certain degree of control in a situation which may well appear overwhelming. Following Braithwaite (2002), we should ensure that restorative justice gives victims the opportunity to talk, that what they say is listened to properly, and that they can understand what is happening. The child must be an active part of the process. Given the scarcity of studies of the effects of restorative interventions on child victims, one may wonder, as Dalrymple asks (1997: 235), whether this is just 'another adult decision making forum in which children feel as disempowered as they do in reviews or case conferences?'. The review by Nixon, Burford, Quinn and Edelbaum (2005) on the involvement of children in FGCs in 17 countries shows that their degree of participation in these practices is lower than one might wish, referring to the safety of children, their age or their inability to comprehend the situation. The authors also note that the decision to participate is not discussed with the child or the child's family, but is usually taken by the professionals involved.

To avoid situations of this kind, professionals require experience and specific training in victimology and child development in order to be able to detect and manage scenarios that reproduce pre-existing dynamics of submission or power imbalances. Children are especially vulnerable to pressure from their figures of reference, and the ability of professionals to control these situations is absolutely essential to the attainment of satisfactory outcomes. Indeed, the lack of specialised training among professionals is one of the major threats to the success of restorative justice processes (Kenney & Clairmont, 2009).

In conclusion, one of the main justifications for the introduction of restorative justice with child victims is that there is now sufficient empirical evidence to show that the model of retributive justice does not adequately protect children from secondary victimisation, not even with all the reforms and improvements that have been proposed over the years. Negative experiences of the justice system may seriously hinder children's recovery after victimisation, but positive experiences can restore their faith in others, help them to face the future with confidence, and contribute to their emotional growth. Restorative justice has an important part to play in the construction of the individual and of a just and democratic society.

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