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Article

Restorative Practice in the Criminal Justice System: Examining a Restorative Reasoning Programme in a Women's Prison

Ella Rees and Jonathan Hobson * 

School of Natural and Social Sciences, University of Gloucestershire, Cheltenham GL50 2RH, UK; ellarees@connect.glos.ac.uk

* Correspondence: jhobson@glos.ac.uk

Abstract: This paper is an analysis of a six-week Restorative Reasoning Programme that took place with 13 women in a UK women's prison. It is an exploratory evaluation based on an adapted version of the QUALIPREV scheme. This two-stage evaluation examines both the processes of the programme, in terms of how well it ran, as well as the outcomes of the programme, in terms of how effective it was in supporting the women to address problem behaviours. Data comprise interviews with the two programme designers and facilitators and with two Prison staff responsible for activities and training; the programme materials used during the scheme; session evaluation forms; and post-programme self-completion reflections from the women engaged in the programme. Overall, the scheme had a range of positive impacts for the women: many expressed a change in attitude, including being more open for discourse and discussion around the harm they may have caused, being more willing to consider the repair needed in their personal relationships, and in some cases seeking subsequent referrals for further restorative work.

Keywords: restorative justice; restorative practice; prison; women in prison; recidivism



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1. Introduction and Literature

There is a significant body of work examining the use of restorative practices in various setting, particularly in settings that have some form of institutional structure; for example, across social work and social care in dealing with issues such as elder abuse (Parkinson et al. 2018); in probation services, as a method to help offenders repair the harm they have caused and move on with their lives (Kirkwood and Hamad 2019); and in policing (Marder 2020). Such work falls into what is often characterised as the classic definitions of restorative justice as programmes that are about “getting reparation, taking responsibility and achieving reconciliation” (McCold and Wachtel 2003). Such programmes seek to bring the offender and victim together, with the support of a community, in order to achieve answers for those harmed, to help harmers consider the impact of their actions, and to provide a way forward for both as they seek to move beyond the incident.

Alongside applications in the criminal justice system, there is a growing body of work that examines restorative practices in settings where the primary focus is not on the harmed–harmer relationship, but on using discursive, relational, and restorative tools to develop reflection, reasoning, and positive cultures and behaviours. For example, schools' restorative programmes are not just used as disciplinary alternatives but increasingly to promote positive relational interactions, manage disruptive behaviours, and tackle non-attendance (Wearmouth et al. 2007; Bevington 2015). In forensic mental health settings, restorative approaches have been found to support the “opportunity to process emotions and develop a coherent narrative about experience” (Cook et al. 2015, p. 15), and are increasingly seen in ‘restorative wards’, in which care aims to embed restorative principles and approaches in day to day practice for both staff and patients (Drennan and Cooper 2018). In supported housing, restorative programmes are being used to support

residents often struggling with complex and overlapping needs in developing personal and interpersonal skills (Hobson et al. 2021).

There is a growing body of research evidencing the impact of restorative practice in prisons. For example, Miers et al.'s (2001) 15 month study of restorative justice schemes in England concluded that offenders showed substantial improvements in terms of attitudes towards victims and generally towards offending. Similarly, Beech and Chauhan's (2013) examination of the Restoration Inside Programme in seven prisons in England and Wales found that offenders who undertook the course had a greater level of concern for their victims, would take more responsibility for their actions, were more internally controlled, and were more motivated to change their behaviour after the course. Prisons have also seen a movement towards programmes that focus on behaviour in a broader context than the acts that might have led to their imprisonment. Dhamia et al. (2009) detail schemes such as 'alternatives to violence' and 'victim awareness' programmes. One of the most well known is the Sycamore Tree Project, which works in over 40 countries worldwide to bring offenders together 'to discuss and address the harm of crime to their lives' (Anderson 2018, p. 210). Beyond this, Dhamia et al. (2009) describe whole-system approaches in which prisons adopt a 'complete RJ Philosophy' that incorporates those imprisoned, prison officers and staff, and both prison and broader workplace culture. This impact of this whole-system approach to creating 'restorative organisations' is evident in Calkin's (2021, p. 107) study, which illustrates how such schemes help in 'preventing and de-escalating conflict, supporting communication, personal and collective responsibility, as well as supporting a rehabilitative culture through acting as a 'social lubricant'.

This article contributes to the debates and evidence based on the use of restorative practices in prisons through an exploratory analysis of one such programme: the Restorative Reasoning Programme. The Restorative Reasoning Programme was delivered to 13 women housed in a medium-security women's prison over six sessions. It was designed by two professional restorative practitioners with the aim to support the women to better understand the impacts of their offending behaviour on themselves and others. This paper evaluates the programme using an adapted version of the QUALIPREV process and outcome evaluation framework (Rummens et al. 2016; Hobson et al. 2018) that uses a thematic structure to analyse a programme both in its structure and delivery (process) as well as in its impacts (outcome). In doing so, it offers insights into how such programmes work, the impact they have on participants, and the potential they have for addressing offending behaviour. This article is presented in two main parts: the first section sets out a context for the case study including details of the prison, the programme, and the data collection and analysis methods deployed. The subsequent section uses an adapted version of the QUALIPREV process and outcome analysis framework to evaluate the Restorative Reasoning Programme. This article finishes with a short conclusion that highlights key successes and contextualises this programme in the light of the challenges and opportunities for such work within prisons.

2. Case Study and Method

The Restorative Reasoning Programme ran in a women's prison in early 2020. The prison houses over 300 women aged 18 and over and is a 'closed category', which, in the UK context, is a medium-security prison that houses those deemed unsuitable for 'open' prisons), and not requiring higher risk 'Category A' or 'Restricted Status' prisons (Prison Reform Trust 2021). The programme was designed and delivered by two experienced restorative practitioners (one male and one female) from a restorative service in the same political and geographical region as the prison. Both practitioners and the service for which they work have a history of working within prisons, and the prison in this case were involved in discussion on programme delivery throughout. This was the first delivery of the programme, functioning as a pilot for the service that designed and delivered the sessions.

The Restorative Reasoning Programme aimed to support the women that engaged to begin in addressing some of their problem behaviours; and in doing so, encourage them to continue with further restorative interventions. Table 1 sets out the programme's learning objectives as well as its intended processes and outcomes.

Table 1. Objectives and Intentions of the Restorative Reasoning Programme.

LEARNING OBJECTIVES
For you to understand your own needs
For you to understand Fair Process
For you to understand the process of restorative justice
For you to accept responsibility for your offending behaviour
For you to understand the reasons you offended
For you to understand your personal response to shame
For you to understand the difference between guilt and shame
To provide support for you to stop offending in the future
For you to decide if you would like to participate in a restorative justice conference
To do this, we will:
Talk about the offence—what has happened
Identify who has been harmed or affected by the offence
Identify how they have been harmed
Introduce you to some theories of “Affect Script Psychology”
We will help you learn the basic theories of Cognitive Behavioural Therapy to help you:
Understand what you were thinking
Understand what you were feeling
Understand your environment
Understand your behaviour
Understand your physical reactions
Practice reflection—on how you think and feel now
Finally, we will work together to:
Find ways you could help to repair some of the harm your behaviour caused
Plan how you could do things differently in future
Look at your goals and harness hope for the future
Identify what steps will be needed to reach your goals
Help you decide whether you would like to take part in a restorative justice conference and
Support you in filling out your referral form for restorative justice

To achieve these outcomes, the Restorative Reasoning Programme included restorative circles to build rapport and address personal challenges; role play to help the participants consider and model different types of behaviours and responses to challenging situations; arts and crafts activities to help build rapport and engage the participants; and short films to help address elements of behaviour and explain parts of the programme. The programme was person centred, which meant that whilst there was a scheduled plan of activities, the nature of the activities changed in response to the different needs of the women over the different sessions. The programme ran for six sessions, which, due to complications in the prison, took place over a six-week period instead of two weeks as initially planned.

A total of 13 women began the programme, although scheduling issues meant two were released before the programme culminated and one transferred to another programme. Participation in the programme was voluntary, with the prison choosing the women who took part and the restorative practitioners accepting those decisions. In choosing those women, the prison advertised the programme to one wing as an open call, although they did appear to have a ‘pool’ of candidates that they felt would be suitable participants. These appeared to be women that had exhibited good behaviour, and the wing in which the programme was advertised was one that has lower incidence of women with poor mental health and substance misuse issues. There was also suggestion that some women were prohibited from participating by offender managers and/or probation services.

This study includes a range of data across the design, delivery, and reception of the programme. This includes the programme materials; interviews with the restorative practitioners and with the prison staff; participant progress reports completed by the practitioners; and self-reflection feedback forms completed by the participants after the programme ended. Table 2 provides further details of the data used in the analysis.

Table 2. Data for this study.

Data Source	Details	Key When Included in Analysis
Interviews with the two restorative facilitators that designed and delivered the programme	1 × group interview with both practicers at the start of the programme ... 2 × individual interviews, one with each practitioner near the end of the programme	Restorative facilitators joint interviewer—RF 1 or 2 ... Restorative facilitators 1 or 2
Interview with the prison activities hub manager	1 × self-completion interview, conducted after the programme completed	Prison activities hub manager
Interview with prison project manager within	1 × 45 min interview, conducted after the programme completed	Prison project manager
Participant progress reports completed by the restorative practitioners	13 × progress forms, reflecting weekly reflections from the restorative practitioners	Progress forms
Post-programme participant self-reflection forms	9 × participant self-reflection feedback forms, completed after the programme	Participant self-reflection form 1–9

The programme took place in early 2020, ending shortly before the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic. As a response, the United Kingdom placed prisons into lockdown, halting visitation and internal programs. Outside of the prison, home working where possible and restricted travel were enforced for all. As a consequence, although the first group interview with the practitioners took place in person, the other interviews were conducted over skype or telephone.

The interviews were semi-structured and thematically organised, as is common in other studies on restorative programmes; for example, [Peterson et al. \(2005\)](#) on in-prison restorative justice intervention; [Keenan et al. \(2016\)](#) on restorative for sexual violence practices in Belgium, Ireland and Norway, and [Moyle and Tauri \(2016\)](#) on family group conferencing and the removal of Māori children. Questions in the interviews were adapted for each group. For the restorative practitioners, this included why they chose those prisons for the programme, how the programme worked, how it reflected restorative principles, implementation of the programme, and their perceptions of programme efficacy. For the prison staff, this included reflections on engagement with the restorative service, why they chose to run the programme and what they hoped it to achieve, costs of running the course, other issues in the deployment or impact of the RRP, and how effective they felt the RRP was.

As part of the analysis, we were provided with anonymised copies of the 13 progress forms, completed at the end of each session in part by the participants, who would score themselves on a scale of 1–4 for their ‘level of participation’, ‘level of understanding’, and ‘ability to apply to self’, where 1 was poor and 4 was excellent. The practitioners were also able to add qualitative narrative to this, with space for an additional overall qualitative summary at the end of the programme run. The project facilitators also provided

anonymised copies of nine self-completion reflection forms received at the end of the programme; of the four others: two women were released before the programme ended, one transferred to another programme, and one did not complete the form. In the self-completion reflection forms, participants considered their experiences of the programme, including any increases in ‘positive’ behaviours, empathy for those harmed by participants actions (both direct and vicarious harm), and reflections on how far the programme provided a comfortable and supportive space to be open and honest.

The exploratory evaluation uses an adaptation of the QUALIPREV process and outcome tool, first developed as a crime-intervention evaluation tool on behalf of the European Crime Prevention Network (Rummens et al. 2016), and successfully adapted and applied for evaluations of restorative interventions by Hobson et al. (2018). QUALIPREV uses a series of key indicators (themes) to analyse the composite parts of a programme under both processes, the implementation of a programme, and Outcome, the impacts of a programme. The original QUALIPREV structure scores key indicators under the Process and Outcome headings in order to provide an overall numerical indicator of the success; our adapted version, based on the work of Hobson et al. (2018), instead provides a more exploratory discursive analysis of the thematic areas under each heading. This application is more flexible, and suitable to this form of exploratory approach as it allows for relative weighting of indicators. Table 3, below, details the QUALIPREV indicators used in the analysis:

Table 3. QUALIPREV indicators used in analysis.

Heading	Key Indicator	Description
Process evaluation	Participation and retention	Participation ‘can refer to general participation or focus on the participation of certain groups’ and retention reflects the continued engagement of those involved, both of which are important factors to help ‘determine whether or not the project can have a lasting impact’ (Rummens et al. 2016, p. 22).
	Implementation and fidelity	An indication of ‘whether or not the ‘intervention was implemented as it was originally designed’ and those issues of delivery that impact of the nature of the project (Rummens et al. 2016, p. 21).
	Accessibility and feasibility	Accessibility and feasibility of restorative reasoning is being defined as the assessment of the project process (Rummens et al. 2016, p. 21).
	External confounding factors	These are those other, external issues that might impact on the programmes, such as ‘wider funding considerations, and local or broader societal issues’ (Rummens et al. 2016, p. 2).
Outcome evaluation	Change in attitudes and behaviours	These are an ‘indicator of whether or not the targeted offending behaviour is less of a viable actions alternative post intervention’ (Rummens et al. 2016, p. 22).
	Development of social skills	These are a reflection of any ‘increase [to] the normative barrier against offending’ (Rummens et al. 2016, p. 22).
	Cost-effectiveness	Often difficult to quantify, this ‘compares the strengths and weaknesses of a prevention project against its cost’ (Rummens et al. 2016, p. 35).

Source: QUALIPREV adaptation from Rummens et al. (2016) and Hobson et al. (2018).

The research received clearance from the University of Gloucestershire School of Natural and Social Sciences ethics panel. Participants were provided with brief and debrief forms, and written or verbal consent was secured. One of the researchers volunteers for the restorative organisation that undertook the programme, so the team were conscious of the ‘insider–outsider’ dynamic (Dwyer and Buckle 2009). This is not uncommon in such studies; for instance, it is similar to Stockdale’s (2017) research of restorative justice within a police force whilst being a member of police staff. To support the fieldwork and to help the team reflect on the insider–outsider dynamic, a reflective diary was kept by the lead researcher (Rowe 2014).

3. Data and Discussion

This section provides an analysis of the Restorative Reasoning Programme using the QUALIPREV process and outcomes headings and constituent indicators. It is in into two parts, Part 1: process evaluation and Part 2: Outcome evaluation. Each part comprises the relevant QUALIPREV indicators as identified in Table 3.

3.1. Part 1: Process Evaluation

The process evaluation aspect of QUALIPREV examines how well an intervention or programme functions. Our thematic analysis of the data resulted in the use of four indicators: participation and retention, implementation and fidelity, accessibility and feasibility, and external confounding factors.

3.1.1. Indicator: Participation and Retention

In this context, participation reflects engagement with the project during its run, and retention reflects the number of participants that remain involved in the project throughout its intended duration (Rummens et al. 2016, p. 22).

Retention in the programme was good: the programme began with thirteen participants, and two were released before the end of the programme. The restorative practitioners were surprised with this, as it was higher than similar schemes they had run:

“I was warned: you will have lots of people like dropping off, dropping out . . . of people staying on it’s usually down to half, if not a quarter.” (Restorative facilitator 2)

Participation whilst in attendance was also reported as good by the facilitators, which was also reflected in the participant progress reports which included self-declared understanding and engagement in sessions. These self-reflection opportunities are important parts of the creative, co-learning environment (Toews 2013), and support facilitators in assessing the extent to which participants’ needs are being met and determining any appropriate modifications. Table 4 presents this self-reported data, averaged across all participants for each session.

Table 4. Average Participation, Understanding, and Apply to Self scores (where 1 is poor and 4 is excellent).

	Average Score for ‘Participation’	Average Score for ‘Understanding’	Average Score for ‘Ability to Apply Concepts to Self’
Session 1	2.15	2.19	1.92
Session 2	2.38	2.65	2.54
Session 3	2.46	2.77	2.69
Session 4	2.77	3.3	3.07
Session 5	3.36	2.69	2.92
Session 6	2.76	3.07	3.0

Source: Authors, compiled from participant progress reports.

The sessions show a pattern of improvement across all three categories, with some variance towards the end when two participants were no longer present after release. Evidence of strong engagement was also seen in the written post-programme participant self-reflection forms:

“I had never heard of it [restorative practice] before so was unsure what to expect, but doing this has helped me to open up more and understand my families thoughts and feelings more . . . [the practitioners] have been fantastic and so has the course.” (Evaluation form 2)

“It has made me realise my behaviour wasn’t correct and how to change it safely . . . thank you for everything you was so considerate and helped me understand a lot.” (Evaluation form 3)

“We had great teachers and I’ll never forget there help. Thank you.” (Evaluation form 6)

There are several potential reasons for this positive engagement and retention. The facilitators were very experienced in running restorative programmes in prison settings and having the same two facilitators manage all sessions aided the development of a positive relationship. The programme had a focus on arts and crafts within the sessions, and there is a significant body of academic evidence to show this to be an effective method of engagement. For example, Hance (2019, p. 212) identified the beneficial use of arts in the RESTORE programme, particularly its ability to build trust with imprisoned women by giving ‘expression to silence and peel away the layers of resistance’. Similar benefits in restorative schemes are also noted by Marcus-Mendoza (2004), Venable (2005), Johnson (2007, 2008); Erickson (2008); Sandoval et al. (2016); Barak and Stebbins (2017), and Wilkinson and Caulfield (2017). The restorative practitioners in this scheme were aware of this, building these elements into the scheme to support participation and retention:

“It was a good way of people winding down. They’ve been talking about things that quite emotional for them . . . that’s one of the reasons for having arts and crafts.” (Restorative practitioner 1)

The Restorative Reasoning Programme had a good level of engagement and participation, particularly as studies of other programmes in prison have shown non-completion rates that can reach 50% (McMurren and Theodosi 2007; Brocato and Wagner 2008). For instance, in a meta-analysis on offender treatment attrition, Olver et al. (2011) illustrated dropout rates between 27.1% (all programs) and 37.8% (specific programs). A contributory factor to engagement for the Restorative Reasoning Programme may have been the long-standing experience of the facilitators in running such schemes in prisons, although it is hard to control for this in an exploratory study of this nature.

3.1.2. Indicator: Implementation and Fidelity

Rummens et al. (2016, p. 21) define fidelity as a measure of whether or not the ‘intervention was implemented as it was originally designed’. In the case of the Restorative Reasoning Programme, the implementation of the scheme was carefully planned. The facilitators were trained and experienced in delivering restorative programmes in prisons, were DBS checked (Disclosure and Barring Service—in the UK, a required check to ascertain whether the subject has a criminal record and is unsuitable for work with vulnerable adults or children), were given security instructions prior to the session, and were provided with Assessment Care and Custody Teamwork training from a Safer Custody Custodial Manager. The Prison staff gave the facilitators a tour of the premises, and a taster session was organised to which:

“A total of 17 women had been invited. Those 17 women were deemed ‘suitable’ for group work after reading their individual case notes, checking alerts on the prison system as well as checking their risk to themselves.” (Prison project manager)

Women from one wing of the prison only were invited to the taster session, and there was some suggestion that both the women selected and some of the women put forward were those that exhibited better behaviour. After the taster session, prison staff further selected those they felt were suitable from this without consultation with the restorative practitioners delivering the Restorative Reasoning Programme. While participants were not coerced into participation, the prison retained a significant gatekeeper role over access).

Data from the restorative practitioners demonstrated caution around the expectations within the programme, for both facilitators and participants:

“It took them ages and ages to stop calling me Miss, which is really hard for me. And so one of the things we negotiated the beginning in the ground rules was . . . that you call me [removed] not Miss, I’m not a prison warden, and it’s habit and it’s difficult for them. But it creates a real power imbalance.” (Interview 2, restorative practitioner)

Care was taken around the ground rules and language used to ensure suitable restorative boundaries were in place, and that the impact of power imbalances was limited. Braithwaite (2002) argues that such power imbalances are structural phenomenon, and

restorative processes must minimise these, instead emphasising the empowering process for stakeholders. O'Mahony (2012, p. 90) similarly argues that such power imbalances, if left unchecked within the restorative process, can negatively affect behaviours and responses. The practitioners worked hard to mitigate the impact of this imbalance:

"What I look for when we're having a group is actually, what do we have in common? And in a sense, restorative justice about opening those communications and facilitating those communications between people from all different walks of life." (Restorative facilitator 2)

There were, however, delays in the delivery schedule of the programme because of restraints in the prison, including staff shortages:

"... the most disruptive thing is the prison itself ... if something happens in prison that is beyond our control, there is nothing you can do about it." (Restorative facilitator 1)

"[The] main impact was the regime during the initial two week period that meant two final sessions had to be cancelled at last minute, only finally going ahead on the third attempt." (Prison project Manager)

This was frustrating for all those involved and is noted within the literature (Friendship et al. 2003; Currie 2012). For the Restorative Reasoning Programme, this resulted in sessions that were shorter than originally planned and required some sessions to be redesigned. Nevertheless, the practitioners felt changes were well received by the participants who were used to such issues:

"... the clientele by definition are quite adaptable within the prison setting. So where you might feel that some of them, if we were doing it in the community, might be quite upset about being let down by their colleagues or co-workers, In the prison setting they're not because they understand the reasons why we might be having another one or they might be prevented from coming because they had an altercation ... You need to bear that in mind and be adaptable." (Restorative facilitator 1)

Although practitioners and participants might accept that the circumstance within prisons means schemes often need to adapt, faithful implementation is important. Maguire (2006) points out that part of accrediting offender programmes within England and Wales is proving a correct process of implementation, justifying appropriateness, and assuring quality of the delivery. Whilst the Prison, the restorative agency, and the participants felt this scheme ran well, it is clear that there remain barriers to faithful implementation of 'through the door' schemes in prisons. Taylor et al. (2017) found there is a need for a renewal of structures, processes, and mechanisms for administering support and addressing rehabilitative needs of prisons. This is particularly true for women's prisons, of which there only 12 (out of 117 across England and Wales). These issues also present a particular problem for restorative schemes as many are funded for work in specific regions, as was the case in this instance. Consequently, such schemes often do not reflect support provided in the community and in this instance, whilst the programme generate five referrals post-programme referrals out of the 13 women that began the process (38% referral rate) *"only one of those is from [the county], so the others we'll have to refer on"* (Restorative facilitator 2).

3.1.3. Indicator: Accessibility and Feasibility

Accessibility reflects the degree to which programmes are inclusive and open to participants that want to engage, and feasibility in this context is a measure of 'whether or not the crime prevention intervention was implemented as it was originally designed' (Rummens et al. 2016, p. 21). Claes and Shapland (2016) emphasise the importance of restorative work as inclusive; however, engaging with communities in institutional settings such as prisons can present a challenge (Hobson et al. 2021). Czerniawski (2016) proposes two sets of dispositional barriers within the prison system in England and Wales: the first includes disadvantaged childhoods, previous educational failure, low self-esteem, mental health disabilities and drug and alcohol abuse; the second includes institutional and

situational factors and barriers such as overcrowding, classroom space, ration of learners to teachers, limited curriculums, and shortage of resources such as computer. Both sets can have significant impacts on accessibility and feasibility of programmes, and some of these were present during the Restorative Reasoning Programme. For example, with difficulties with literacy, the restorative practitioners described how participants:

“... require time more so to understand the kinds of questions and things and instructions then and also we’ve had quite a lot of time constraints.” (Restorative facilitators joint interview—RF2)

Literacy rates are a persistent issue within the prison system, with research showing that prisoners basic skill levels are “disproportionately poor” compared to the rest of the population (Dawe 2007; Davis et al. 2013). Creese (2015) identified literacy rates within the English and Welsh prison populations at 50% at a Level 1 or 2, compared to 85% of the general population. The Restorative Reasoning Programme was designed with issues such as this in mind, as the practitioners describe:

“A few things that have come out of [the pilot] ... about people with learning difficulties etc ... If somebody is autistic for example or is visual learner or has trouble literacy we would like to look at how we can present all the materials pictorially.” (Restorative facilitator 2)

The practitioners were cautious in making too many changes, however, as they were concerned that adapting the scheme too much might lead to over specificity and exclusion of other groups. Such considerations reflect the difficulty in delivering group restorative programmes in prisons, especially where there is limited opportunity to influence the makeup of participants. Robinson and Shapland (2008) raise similar concerns about the influence of criminal justice and the vague guidelines for offender-orientated restorative work. Barton and Brown (2017) also identify the dangers in assumptions that those imprisoned share similar social demographics, arguing that diversity within populations can be ignored. In the Netherlands, Qiu (2020, p. 48) shows how prisons are trying to tackle these issues by working to ‘create positive expectations, strengthen inmate’s faith in themselves and improve self-control’. Carlen (2013) argues that there is a need for accreditation of such prison programmes, a sentiment reflected in the recent UK All Party Parliamentary Group enquiry into restorative justice and restorative practices, which recommended it become a ‘mandatory requirement for all commissioned services to be registered’ (Simon et al. 2021).

3.1.4. Indicator: External Confounding Factors

External confounding factors are those other issues that might impact on the delivery of a programme, with Rummens et al. (2016, p. 2) giving examples of “other crime prevention initiatives, wider funding considerations, and local or broader societal issues”. In the context of the Restorative Reasoning Programme, one of the key confounding factors was the lack of resources:

“They seem to have a real shortage of courses.” (Restorative facilitators joint interview—RF2)

“They simply didn’t have enough staff lots of calling in sick and so on and that meant they had to pull all of the prison staff off the education block.” (Restorative facilitator 1)

“It was not a nice room at all ... I think that was one of the things I mostly did struggle with, because obviously the environment does play a toll on it ... there’s hardly any windows in there you know, there was hardly any lighting there, next door to residential.” (Prison activities hub manager)

The funding for the National Offender Management Service has seen significant reductions in recent years (Comptroller and Auditor General 2017). UK Government spending for prisons in 2017/18 was 14% lower than in 2009/10 in real terms and this has partly driven a reduction in staffing in public prisons, fewer resources, and prolonged time in cells with reduced access to services such as mental health, education, and rehabilitation

(Burki 2017). This is a significant confounding and is compounded further by the often precarious funding of restorative service providers.

A further external confounding factor was the impact of COVID-19 and the near lockdown of prisons across the UK. The World Health Organisation's guidelines on responding to COVID-19 recommending that custodial and health agencies jointly engage in risk management, prevention and control, treatment, and information sharing. With some prisons over 160% of capacity, Nishiura et al. (2020) note transmission of COVID-19 in a closed environment as 18.7 times higher compared to an open air environment. The first cases of COVID-19 were confirmed in HMP Manchester mid march, with estimates of over 500 (287 prisoners, 217 prison staff and 8 Prison Escorting and Custody Services staff) cases in the following month across England and Wales (Prison Reform Trust 2020). The prison in this case study was put into COVID-19 lockdown shortly after the Restorative Reasoning Programme was complete, limiting the ability for the restorative practitioners to engage in face-to-face post-session reviews and from further runs of the programme with other groups:

"It's really, really difficult I mean we've never had anything sort of quite like this, of course, we have to find a way how to ... cope with all these isolating women ... and making sure that the self-harm and suicide rate doesn't go up." (Prison activities hub manager)

"Everything now has stopped ... it's the prison on lockdown ... education staff don't come in anymore ... I'm trying to get a programme together so that they can do some activities because you know they're in their cells all the time now ... and you know also no visits anymore ... it's all these ripple effects." (Prison activities hub manager)

Studies have pointed towards COVID-19 raising negative psychological effects including confusion, anger, infection fears, frustration, boredom, inadequate supplies and information (Brooks et al. 2020; Serafini et al. 2020). This further supports studies looking at the long-term impacts of quarantines revealed high psychological distress and post-traumatic stress disorder symptoms, including emotional disturbances (Lee et al. 2006). These wider impacts of COVID-19 will continue to manifest, for the context of this case study it had a clear impact not only on the development and deployment of a broader RRP, but also on the longer-term well-being of the participants that took part in this pilot study.

3.2. Part 2: Outcome Evaluation

The outcome evaluation examines the impact of an intervention or programme, and uses the following indicators, which are reworkings of the QUALIPREV Outcome indicators (see Table 3): changes in attitudes and behaviours; development of social skills; cost-effectiveness. Unlike the process evaluation, in which the analysis focuses on the programme as it functions, the outcome evaluation includes data that reflect on changes in perception and attitude. Although changes in attitude are important outcomes of a project, it is difficult to ascribe these to concrete changes in behaviour.

3.2.1. Indicator: Changes in Attitudes and Behaviours

The QUALIPREV indicator for changes in attitudes considered success as 'an indicator of whether or not the targeted offending behaviour is less of a viable action alternative post intervention' (Rummens et al. 2016, p. 23). In this context, this is the ability for the Restorative Reasoning Programme to challenge the justifications for offending behaviours and to help approach some of the underlying attitudes to self and others. In the post-programme interviews, the restorative practitioners discussed the impact they felt that the course had on the participant identifying changes in attitudes and behaviours:

"There's been a huge impact on them [participants] ... huge development of empathy" (Facilitator 1)

"She feels bad about it. Wants to make amends. I also think she wants to talk a bit about what got her there as well" (Restorative facilitator 1)

"We had some good outcomes . . . I wouldn't say we changed their lives, but we certainly changed attitudes to each other and in relationships and what they were doing themselves" (Restorative facilitator 1)

"I would never have the courage to open up about how I first started using, wouldn't be strong enough to be able to hear how it's affecting my family if I hadn't met you amazing guys and done your course. I am stronger and more focused and more committed than ever to stay clean and in recovery." (Letter from a participant to a facilitator, quoted to us in interview with restorative facilitator 2)

The development of empathy, forgiveness, and self-reflection features large in the literature on effective restorative practices (Van Ness 2007; Day et al. 2008; Baglivio and Jackowski 2015; Narvey et al. 2020). Rehabilitation is particularly effective where there is a safe environment to express challenging emotions around remorse or self-forgiveness. In the self-evaluation forms completed at the end of the programme, the women were often very reflective on the harm that their actions had caused:

"I now have a better understanding of how my actions have impacted on my family and friends." (Participant self-reflection form 1)

"I am now more aware of how my actions impact other people . . . it has made me think before I act as my behaviour may affect people around me." (Evaluation form 8)

"It has made me realise my behaviour wasn't correct and how to change it safely." (Participant self-reflection form 2)

As well as reflections on behaviour, the women also talked about taking a more open approach to talking about the difficult emotions around their personal biographies and emotions:

"I feel that I can now talk about my feelings in a group with others." (Participant self-reflection form 8)

"Definitely has made me think differently, more positively. Yes, it has impacted [me] because now I think before I talk, I never used to." (Participant evaluation form 3)

Kelly (2014) examined the use of restorative practice for supporting emotional regulation, recognition of emotions, and addressing behavioural change. Improvements in these areas was a common theme in the participant self-reflection forms, with the women commenting on an increase in confidence and self-esteem. This is particularly important considering that those in prison are more likely to struggle with low self-esteem, confidence, psychological distress, and mental health issues (Debowska et al. 2016). Literature also points towards a relationship between higher self-esteem and characteristics such as psychological maturity, calmness and realism, and greater ability to manage disappointment. The benefits of programmes in prisons that seek to improve confidence and self-esteem are well evidenced, with a growing body of work on the use of restorative principles in doing so (Calkin 2021). Although there is clear evidence of this in the Restorative Reasoning Programme, from the data collected, it is not possible to say how this will translate into longer-lasting change in those that participated.

As a further indicator of outcomes and impact, the programme also resulted in five subsequent referrals from participants to the restorative justice agency, requesting interventions for interventions, a *"really good take out rate . . . 40% hit rate"* (restorative facilitator 2) as one practitioner put it. As identified in the process evaluation, however, four of the five referrals were from areas outside of the remit of the organising restorative agency and subsequently had to be referred to other agencies.

It is important to note that schemes such as the Restorative Reasoning Programme should be understood in the complex context of both the personal circumstances of participants, the complex realities of a prison setting, and the reality of being a prisoner. Taylor et al. (2017) argue that that prison and through the gate services still need significant attention, and although there were significant impacts noted by both the practitioners and

the participants in this study, the prison activities manager was more circumspect around the impact in relation to the range of other programmes and support the participants had and were undertaking at the time:

"I believe as the programme stands, it could be a contributory factor for reducing poor behaviour but unsure if alone it would have that effect." (Prison activities Hub Manager)

Although the data in this indicator, as with much of the outcome evaluation, are exploratory and therefore difficult to extrapolate to changes in behaviour, it is important to acknowledge that improvements to self-esteem, confidence, and the ability to be self-reflective are important. This is particularly true for those who struggle with such introspection and poor mental health, as is common amongst women in prison. It would require longitudinal data to establish how far this change followed the participants as they transition from being imprisoned.

3.2.2. Indicator: Development of Social Skills

This indicator aims to identify positive outcomes in terms of increases in social skills, which, whilst not the primary aim of the programme, was evident in the feedback and reflections. For instance, both restorative practitioners noted that social skills had developed throughout the programme:

"These women do self-regulate, talk to each other about respect responsibility, when you remind them to . . . And some of them I think have proven to be really key to actually assist others in teaching the course." (Restorative practitioner 1)

"We did notice was quite a few interesting things about leadership skills coming out where you may not expect them so when you have somebody out in the group, what [the other practitioner] and I try to do is to get right, okay, well, they're obviously capable to do more here, let's get them to lead a task." (Restorative practitioner 1)

Some of the women also reflected on the development of social and other skills as part of the programme:

"It has helped me a lot and helped me to have skills I can put into daily life." (Participant evaluation form 2)

"Helped me look at the types of relationships I have got into" (changed my thinking), want positive relationships." (Participant evaluation form 4)

"It has made me think before I act as my behaviour may affect people around me." (Participant evaluation form 2)

This outcome of the Restorative Reasoning Programme reflects the findings of others such as [Griffiths and Restorative Practice Development Team \(2016\)](#), who discuss the value of restorative practice to build and restore relationships and to prevent and repair conflict by enabling people to effectively communicate. They found that restorative work with women may be more heartfelt, pointing towards the restorative process being "particularly beneficial to female participants". RESTORE, a similar restorative practice programme in UK prisons, has been described as having a specific tone and content to help offenders change their thought processes within a CJS setting. As with the findings in this paper, that programme encourages a greater awareness of victims and victim empathy, attitude changes towards anger and revenge, and emphasis on the value of forgiveness ([Adler and Mir 2012](#)).

3.2.3. Indicator: Cost-Effectiveness

Cost-effectiveness can be difficult to ascertain, particularly in programmes that attempt to create changes in thinking and behaviour as these are difficult to quantify, particularly as a financial value. Other studies on restorative programmes have established value as a benefit; for instance, the well-known studies from [Shapland et al. \(2006, 2011\)](#) claim the benefits of restorative justice exceed costs by 8:1, and [Braithwaite and Gohar \(2014\)](#) similarly conclude high cost-effectiveness in restorative justice interventions. Nevertheless, tracking

such costs can be extremely difficult since, as [Gavrielides \(2016\)](#) points out, restorative work often contains hidden costs related to the involvement of voluntary and third-sector services that are not conducted for profit but for breaching the gap in public service provision.

Although establishing cost can be difficult, there are often transparent data on salary, time, facilities, and other consumables used as part of a programme. Establishing value is more challenging, relying on assumptions of the value of changed behaviour and on savings estimates from reductions in recidivism. One way to capture both cost and value is to consider that which has a direct cost attributed to it, and the direct and indirect costs of the Restorative Reasoning Programme were low, as [Table 5](#) shows. Part of this was because the programme was in a pilot phase, and future runs that catered to larger groups would need to upscale resources, time, and prison space—although the latter was provided for free as part of the established estate.

Table 5. Estimated cost of restorative reasoning, based on data shared from the restorative organisation providing the service.

Restorative reasoning = 24 h duration for 2 × restorative practitioners	Approx. £1000
Costs of resources (for group of 13)	£250
Establishing and preparing programme:	Approx. £1500
Total	£2750

Source: Authors, compiled from data provided by restorative organising delivering the service.

Establishing value is much harder, especially as the follow-up interviews post-release to track behaviour changes were impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic. However, it was clear from the outcome indicators for changes in behaviour and increase in social skills that the programme was having an impact on the women that participated. Although it is very difficult from this dataset to establish the longer-term impacts, the restorative practitioners reflected on the value of the programme as part of the post-study interviews:

“You have to you have to think about it the potential for a lifetime offending imprisonment and everything else. You have to think about how long it takes to deliver. I do think it’s cost effective and if it if it stops sort of one/two people in a group in their tracks in terms of re-offending, then that would have saved an awful lot of money.” (Restorative facilitator 2)

Further evidence of potential success includes the high retention and self-identified participation rates in the programme. In an evaluation of prisoner engagement in rehabilitative programmes, [McMurrin and McCulloch \(2007\)](#) found that reconviction rates for non-completions was higher one year on compared to those who completed treatment. Engagement in self-reflection and behaviour change through the Restorative Reasoning Programme was further evident in the five self-referrals the restorative practitioners received from participants after the programme had ended. In these cases, the women had contacted the practitioners to request further restorative processes providing them with an opportunity to address some of the harm they had caused to others and work towards repairing personal relationships. Any positive change to offending behaviour represents a potentially significant saving, as the Ministry of Justice calculate the average direct cost per prisoner in 2018/19 in England and Wales as £26,133, rising to £39,385.31 when taking into account all resource expenditure ([Sturge et al. 2019](#)).

4. Conclusions

The prison posed a challenging environment for restorative programme implementation and delivery. This is true both in the personal difficulties faced by the women that took part in the programme, as well as in the circumstances around running restorative programmes in prisons in institutional settings. Prisons serve as a legitimate source of control, where those imprisoned can feel obligated to obey rules, express moral value

alignment with staff, and live by a set of rules that are followed within the prison, all to be exercised through fair use of authority. These institutional settings, however, can present a challenge to restorative programmes and the need for participants to enter into those processes willingly (Hobson et al. 2021). In this instance, we briefly talk about three challenges: willing participation; power imbalances; and evidencing success.

The first challenge is free and willing participation. In this programme, there was a relatively open opportunity for women on one wing of the prison to participate, although the wing was one in which there was generally better behaviour and there was a suggestion that some women were prohibited from participating by offender managers and/or probation services. Banwell-Moore (2019) suggests that there is an institutional inertia, combined with the culture, mechanisms and approaches adopted by criminal justice professionals, which can dictate participation in restorative programmes. Although risk assessing participants is an important dimension to ensuring safe restorative processes, it is important that restorative processes are as inclusive as possible (Shapland et al. 2011; Rossner 2013).

The second challenge for this programme, as with all such schemes in institutional settings, is the heightened potential for power imbalances. Braithwaite (2002) and O'Mahony (2012) point out the negative impact on restorative practices if power imbalances are manifest, and whilst the Restorative Reasoning Programme worked hard to address these issues, it is difficult to eliminate them within a prison setting. This does not mean that such schemes will always fail, as is evident in the high participation and retention rates in this scheme, and in the subsequent post-programme self-referrals. This is unusual for prison programmes, where such participation and retention rates can be low (Brocato and Wagner 2008; McMurran and Theodosi 2007; Olver et al. 2011).

The final challenge is in evidencing success. Whilst the self-completion forms, the self-referral and the reflections from the practitioners suggest that the Restorative Reasoning Programme had some valuable impacts on the women that participated, it is difficult to truly evidence these without follow-up or longitudinal study. However, Wood's (2015) meta-analysis of recidivism shows a reduction where restorative approaches are used, and McMurran and McCulloch (2007) found that reconviction rates for non-completers was higher one year on compared to those who completed treatment. What it is possible to say, therefore, is that the engagement and reflection from participants represent an important part of this process.

Overall, the findings from this analysis of the Restorative Reasoning Programme contribute to an increasing body of evidence around the efficacy of restorative practices in prisons. Research from those such as Van Ness (2007); Day et al. (2008); Baglivio and Jackowski (2015); and Narvey et al. (2020) all show that programmes that utilise such approaches can lead to positive changes in attitudes towards victims, family members, and self. This case study highlights the potential impact of restorative programmes for the women involved; the women that took part in the programme described changes in thinking and behaviour indicative of personal development, reinforced by five of the 13 participants (38%) self-referring to the restorative facilitators for further restorative work after that programme had ended. Whilst it is difficult from the evidence to show that this programme has had long-term, concrete impacts on participants' lives, it is clear that it had significant impacts for many on their thinking and self-perceptions whilst part of and in the immediate aftermath of the programme.

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