

Restorative Justice Initiatives: Public opinion and support in NSW

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Aim: To measure public opinion and support for restorative justice initiatives for theft/vandalism and assault offences across NSW in 2011.

Method: An independent market research company completed 2,530 telephone interviews with NSW residents over a 4-week period.

Results: There was widespread support for restorative justice initiatives. Most respondents agreed that offenders' sentences should include unpaid work in the community (85.9%); and that victims should be given the opportunity to inform offenders of the harm caused (87.3%), and have a say in how the offender can make amends for that harm (73.8%). While the restorative justice initiatives of 'making amends to victims' and 'unpaid work in the community', were viewed as less effective in preventing crime and disorder compared to 'better supervision of young people by parents' or 'better mental health care', they were viewed as more effective than receiving 'a prison sentence'. Women, regional dwellers, those with lower educational attainment, crime victims and those displaying more punitive attitudes tended to be more supportive of restorative justice principles.

Conclusion: The results suggest that the principles underpinning restorative justice initiatives are well supported by the community.

Keywords: restorative justice, Youth Justice Conference, public opinion survey, juvenile offenders

Introduction

Restorative justice is a broad concept used to define a range of practices aimed at repairing the harm caused by a crime. Once an offender has admitted guilt, restorative justice practices can occur at any stage in the criminal justice process. While restorative justice is typically used in criminal justice settings, it can also be used in civil disputes, including school, workplace or family welfare settings. International support for restorative justice among crime and legal experts gained momentum in the 1990s and since then, Australia and New Zealand have become world leaders in the use of conferencing (particularly for juveniles) as one approach to restorative justice (Daly & Hayes, 2001).

Over the last two decades, conferencing has been legislated in all Australian states and territories in an effort to address youth crime. While some jurisdictional variation exists¹, conferencing is typically used as a diversionary measure from court proceedings, and aims to bring the offender face-to-face

with the victim/s of the offence, as well as any family and/or support persons (for either party) (Daly & Hayes, 2001). The purpose of a conference is to encourage the young person to accept responsibility for the offence, and to attempt to repair the harm caused by the young person agreeing to some form of restitution to the victim, for example, an apology, monetary compensation, community work, or participation in a behavioural program (Clancey, Doran, & Maloney, 2005; Trimboli, 2000). In addition, the conference process is designed to give the victim a voice in the criminal justice process (Clancey et al., 2005).

Research results on the effectiveness of restorative justice practices in reducing the likelihood of re-offending have been mixed (for a review see Smith & Weatherburn, 2012). Although some Australian and international studies have indicated that conferencing is more effective than court in reducing youth re-offending (Luke & Lind, 2002; Bergseth & Bouffard, 2007), other studies have found no significant effects (Triggs, 2005; Smith & Weatherburn, 2012). Such mixed findings are

largely the result of methodological limitations, including an inadequate selection of controls, the use of small sample sizes and inconsistent definitions of re-offending (McGrath, 2008; Smith & Weatherburn, 2012). While the results of these studies suggest that it would be ill-advised for policy makers to rely on conferencing to reduce re-offending, restorative justice initiatives have other desirable features. Victims who are surveyed at the end of a conference tend to be highly satisfied with the process (Trimboli, 2000). There is also some evidence that conferencing is a more time-efficient way of disposing of cases in the justice system (Moore, 2011).

In general, members of the public (both in Australia and internationally) tend to show little confidence in the response of the criminal justice system to crime (Jones, Weatherburn, & McFarlane, 2008; Roberts, Stalans, Indermaur, & Hough, 2003; Smart Justice, 2010; Warner, Davis, Walter, Bradfield, & Vermey, 2011). For example, around two-thirds of randomly selected members of the New South Wales (NSW) public suggested that sentences are 'too lenient' or 'much too lenient' when questioned about the appropriateness of penalties imposed by the courts (Jones et al., 2008). These punitive attitudes tend to diminish, however, when members of the public are given specific information about the cases. For example, the attitudes of jurors (who are presented with the same information as judges) on the adequacy of sentencing are much less punitive than would be indicated by general public opinion polls (e.g., Warner et al., 2011).

Much less is known about community attitudes toward restorative justice initiatives or the level of support for the principles underpinning restorative justice theory. The limited research that exists suggests that while community knowledge of restorative justice is poor, the attitudes of the general public are fairly positive when they are explicitly asked to consider alternatives to traditional criminal justice processes (Pali & Pelikan, 2010). Moreover, the evidence suggests that public support for restorative justice is positively associated with a number of factors, including if the victim receives reparation (particularly monetary compensation); if those surveyed have previously had active involvement in criminal justice processes (e.g., as a juror); if the matter involves juvenile offenders (especially if there is no prior criminal record); if the matter involves less serious offences; if the offender expresses guilt or remorse; and if the principles underlying restorative justice are highlighted rather than focusing on whether the initiatives are cost-effective (Pali & Pelikan, 2010; Roberts et al., 2003).

Few studies have been conducted which seek to identify levels of support for the individual principles underlying restorative justice initiatives among the general population. A notable exception is a recent telephone survey of the public conducted across Great Britain one month after riots in a number of English cities. Of the 1,000 members of the public who responded to the survey, almost all supported offenders doing unpaid work in the community as part of their sentence. In addition, the majority supported enhancing the place of the victim by giving them an opportunity both to express to the offender the harm caused and allow the victim a say in determining how the

offender can repair the harm caused (Prison Reform Trust, 2011).

These findings paint an intriguing picture of public attitudes towards the administration of justice. While members of the public tend to demand harsher sentences, when given the option, they also tend to support initiatives that require offenders to restore the harm caused by the offence. Unfortunately, most of this research has been conducted in countries other than Australia, with Australian research largely focusing on participant satisfaction with the conferencing process (Strang, 2001). Public attitudes towards restorative justice initiatives observed in other countries cannot be assumed to be universal. Australian public attitudes toward restorative justice may be quite different to attitudes in the UK, which has seen some dramatic confrontations between police and young people in recent years (Taylor, Wainwright, Quinn, Walker, & Syal, 2011).

Aim

The aim of this study was to measure public opinion and support for restorative justice initiatives dealing with theft/vandalism and assault offences across NSW in 2011. This was addressed by replicating part of the UK survey (Prison Reform Trust, 2011) in a local context. Since public attitudes towards restorative justice may vary depending on the characteristics of the community, a secondary aim of this survey was to identify potential correlates of public sentiment towards restorative justice initiatives.

Method

Study sample

An independent market research company (Taverners Research) was commissioned to undertake the data collection. The telephone survey was conducted over a four-week period from November to December 2011. A total of 9,218 calls were made to valid 'in scope' telephone numbers.² Of these, 1,016 (11.0%) reported that their household contained no members in the required age range, gender or location combination,³ 4,688 (50.9%) where an eligible household member refused to participate in the survey, 699 (7.6%) where language difficulties prevented the interview from proceeding, 195 (2.1%) where the person selected was not available during the interview period, 90 (1.0%) where an appointment was made but the interview was still pending at the end of the survey period. In 2,530 (27.4%) cases, an interview was conducted. Survey weights were provided to match the population on age group (18-34; 35-54; 55-64; 64+), gender and education (having a degree or not).⁴

Variables

Most of the survey items were drawn directly from the UK study (Prison Reform Trust, 2011) which focused on community opinions of restorative justice in relation to theft/vandalism offences. For the current study, three questions were added to assess support for restorative justice in relation to assault offences. To minimise bias, the ordering of the questions was rotated during the administration of the interview.

Age group: Age of the respondent was coded into six categories – 18-24 years, 25-34 years, 35-44 years, 45-54 years, 55-64 years, and 65+ years.

Sex: Sex of the respondent.

Region: The respondent's postcode was used to code their region of residence as either Sydney or other NSW.

Highest level of education completed: The respondent was asked to specify the highest level of education they had completed. This was coded into five categories – completed School Certificate (Year 10) or less; completed Higher School Certificate (Year 12) or equivalent; completed a trade/diploma/other certificate or qualification; completed a bachelor degree; completed a graduate diploma or higher degree. A small proportion of the sample refused to answer this question ($n = 4$, 0.2%) or answered 'don't know' ($n = 3$, 0.1%). For the bivariate analyses, this variable was further coded into having a degree (either bachelor or graduate diploma/higher degree) or no degree.

Current employment status: The respondent was asked to specify their current employment status and this was coded into three categories – full-time employed; part-time employed; other (including those who were unemployed, studying, retired, or not seeking work). A small proportion of the sample refused to answer this question ($n = 4$, 0.2%) or answered 'don't know' ($n = 3$, 0.1%).

Marital status: The respondent was asked to specify their marital status and this was coded into three categories – single, never married; married or in a defacto relationship; divorced, separated or widowed. A small proportion of the sample refused to answer this question ($n = 3$, 0.1%).

Ever been a victim of crime: The respondent was asked to specify whether they or a family member had ever been a victim of a crime. A small proportion of the sample refused to answer this question ($n = 1$, < 0.1%) or answered 'don't know' ($n = 8$, 0.3%). Respondents who answered 'yes' to this question ($n = 1,401$; 55.6%) were asked a follow-up question regarding whether any of the crimes involved violence or the threat of violence.

Perceived frequency of crimes occurring in their neighbourhood: The respondent was asked to specify how often crimes happen in the area where they live and this was coded as never, rarely, sometimes, or frequently. While only one person (< 0.1%) refused to answer this question, 86 (3.4%) respondents answered 'don't know'.

Perceived leniency/severity of sentences imposed by the courts: The respondent was asked whether, in general, they believed that sentences imposed by the courts were too tough, about right or too lenient. If the respondent answered 'too lenient', they were asked whether that was a little too lenient or much too lenient, whereas if the respondent answered 'too tough' they were asked whether that was a little too tough or much too tough. Twelve (0.5%) respondents refused to answer this question, and 308 (12.2%) respondents answered 'don't know'.

Level of agreement with restorative justice principles: The respondent was asked to what extent they agreed or disagreed (measured on a 5-point Likert scale from strongly agree to strongly disagree) with the following statements – (i) people who have committed offences should be required as part of their sentence to do unpaid work in the community; (ii) victims should be given the opportunity to inform offenders of the harm and distress they have caused; (iii) victims should have a say in how the offender can best make amends for the harm they have caused (with amends defined as showing remorse and working to put things right). Each statement was asked in relation to both theft/vandalism offences, and assault.⁵ The proportion of respondents who either refused to answer or answered 'don't know' to each of these statements is detailed in the footnotes to Table 2.

Perceived effectiveness of measures to prevent crime and disorder: The respondent was asked how effective (if at all) (measured on a 5-point Likert scale from very effective to not at all effective) they thought each of the following would be in preventing crime and disorder – better supervision of young people by parents; better mental health care; unpaid work in the community; treatment to tackle drug addiction; a prison sentence; making amends to victims; and treatment to tackle binge drinking. The proportion of respondents who either refused to answer or answered 'don't know' to each of these statements is detailed in the footnotes to Table 3.

Analysis

Descriptive analyses were carried out to determine the characteristics of the sample, and detail the proportion of respondents who supported the three restorative justice principles. The McNemar test was carried out to compare theft/vandalism offences and assault on the level of agreement with each of the restorative justice principles. The McNemar test was also used to compare the two restorative justice initiatives against various other measures on their perceived effectiveness in preventing crime and disorder. In addition, chi-square tests of association were used to examine whether respondent characteristics were associated with support for the three restorative justice principles.

Results

Characteristics of the sample

Table 1 shows the characteristics of the sample. A slightly larger proportion of the sample were female (51.3% vs. 48.7%), with the majority of the sample aged 45 years or older (61.1%). The majority of the sample resided in Sydney compared to the rest of NSW (66.9%), had completed a qualification beyond high school (61.2%), were currently employed (either full- or part-time) (63.6%), and were either married or living in a defacto relationship (70.4%). Just over half the sample reported that they or a family member had ever been a victim of a crime (55.6%). More than half of the sample reported the belief that crimes occurred sometimes or frequently in their neighbourhood (59.1%). The majority of the sample believe that the sentences imposed by the courts are 'too lenient' (includes 'a little too lenient' or 'much too lenient'; 70.7%).

Table 1. Characteristics of the sample

Respondent characteristics	N	%
Sex		
Male	1,231	48.7
Female	1,299	51.3
Age (years)		
18-24	156	6.2
25-34	332	13.1
35-44	497	19.6
45-54	476	18.8
55-64	485	19.2
65 +	584	23.1
Region		
Sydney	1,692	66.9
Other NSW	838	33.1
Highest level of education completed ^a		
Completed School Certificate (Year 10) or less	547	21.7
Completed Higher School Certificate (Year 12) or equivalent	432	17.1
Trade/Diploma/other certificate or qualification	556	22.0
Bachelor degree	526	20.8
Graduate Diploma or higher degree	462	18.3
Current employment status ^a		
Full-time	1,102	43.7
Part-time/casual	503	19.9
Other (unemployed, student, retired, not seeking work)	918	36.4
Marital status ^b		
Single, never married	365	14.4
Married/defacto relationship	1,780	70.4
Divorced, separated or widowed	382	15.1
Ever been a victim of crime (the respondent or a family member) ^c		
Yes	1,401	55.6
No	1,120	44.4
Perceived frequency of crimes occurring in their neighbourhood ^d		
Never	84	3.4
Rarely	916	37.5
Sometimes	903	37.0
Frequently	540	22.1
Perceived leniency/severity of sentences imposed by the courts ^e		
Much too tough	17	0.8
A little too tough	41	1.9
About right	590	26.7
A little too lenient	667	30.2
Much too lenient	895	40.5

^a 4 respondents refused to answer, and 3 respondents answered 'don't know'. This footnote applies to both 'current employment status' and 'marital status'.

^b 3 respondents refused to answer.

^c 1 respondent refused to answer, and 8 respondents answered 'don't know'.

^d 1 respondent refused to answer, and 86 respondents answered 'don't know'.

^e 12 respondents refused to answer, and 308 respondents answered 'don't know'.

Level of agreement with restorative justice principles

Table 2 shows the level of agreement with each of the statements on the principles of restorative justice and compares responses for theft/vandalism and assault offences. Figure 1 graphically summarises the proportion of the sample who strongly agreed with each principle, and again compares theft/vandalism offences to assault. As both Table 2 and Figure 1 show, the overwhelming majority of the sample supported each of the restorative justice principles. Public support for offenders being required to do unpaid work in the community as part of their sentence was significantly higher in cases involving theft/

Table 2. Level of agreement with restorative justice principles (n = 2,530)

Restorative justice principles	Theft/ vandalism offences		Assault offences	
	n	%	n	%
People who have committed offences should be required as part of their sentence to do unpaid work in the community ^a				
Strongly agree	1,672	66.4	1427	56.9
Moderately agree	611	24.3	605	24.1
Neither agree or disagree	93	3.7	163	6.5
Moderately disagree	87	3.5	178	7.1
Strongly disagree	54	2.1	133	5.3
<i>p</i> < .001 ^b				
Victims should be given the opportunity to inform offenders of the harm and distress they have caused ^c				
Strongly agree	1,325	52.7	1536	61.0
Moderately agree	850	33.8	683	27.1
Neither agree or disagree	165	6.6	119	4.7
Moderately disagree	131	5.2	116	4.6
Strongly disagree	44	1.7	62	2.5
<i>p</i> < .001 ^b				
Victims should have a say in how the offender can best make amends for the harm they have caused ^d				
Strongly agree	1,024	40.8	1128	45.0
Moderately agree	812	32.3	739	29.5
Neither agree or disagree	205	8.2	194	7.7
Moderately disagree	291	11.6	285	11.4
Strongly disagree	179	7.1	161	6.4
<i>p</i> < .010 ^b				

^a For theft/vandalism offences: 3 respondents refused to answer, and 10 respondents answered 'don't know'. For assault offences: 1 respondent refused to answer, and 23 respondents answered 'don't know'.

^b *p*-value for McNemar test for level of agreement with restorative justice initiatives for theft/vandalism offences compared to assault.

^c For theft/vandalism offences: 15 respondents answered 'don't know'. For assault offences: 1 respondent refused to answer, and 13 respondents answered 'don't know'.

^d For theft/vandalism offences: 19 respondents answered 'don't know'. For assault offences: 23 respondents answered 'don't know'.

vandalism offences (66.4% strongly agreed) compared to assault (56.9% strongly agreed). In cases of assault (compared to theft/vandalism offences), the public were more likely to support measures enhancing victim participation in the criminal justice process (i.e., victims having the opportunity to inform offenders of the harm caused: 61.0% vs. 52.7% strongly agreed, or victims being able to have a say in how the offender can best make amends for the harm caused: 45.0% vs. 40.8% strongly agreed with these statements).

Perceived effectiveness of measures to prevent crime and disorder

Table 3 shows the perceived effectiveness of various measures to prevent crime and disorder. Figure 2 graphically summarises the proportion of the sample who rated each measure as effective (either 'very effective' or 'quite effective'). The measure rated as effective by the largest proportion of the sample was 'better supervision of young people by parents' (89.3%), followed by 'better mental health care' (85.3%), then 'treatment to tackle drug addiction' (82.6%), and 'treatment to tackle binge drinking' (71.6%). Of interest, is the finding that the two restorative justice initiatives to prevent crime and disorder, 'making amends to victims' (66.9% effective) and 'unpaid work in the community' (64.7% effective) were rated as significantly less effective than most of the other measures assessed. Both of these restorative justice initiatives were rated as significantly more effective than only one of the other measures in preventing crime and disorder, 'a prison sentence' (61.8% effective).

Respondent characteristics and support for restorative justice initiatives

Due to small cell sizes for some comparisons, for the following analyses, respondents who either 'strongly agreed' or 'moderately agreed' with these principles were collapsed together, as were those who either 'strongly disagreed' or 'moderately disagreed'.

Table 4 shows the relationship between the respondents' socio-demographic characteristics and their support for offenders being required to do unpaid work in the community for theft/vandalism and assault offences. Females (theft/vandalism offences only), those living outside of Sydney (theft/vandalism

offences only), individuals who perceive the sentences imposed by the court as too lenient (theft/vandalism and assault offences), individuals without a degree (assault offences only), and those who had never been a victim of a crime (assault offences only) were significantly more likely to agree (compared to disagree) that offenders should be required to do unpaid work in the community as part of their sentence.

Table 5 shows the relationship between the respondents' socio-demographic characteristics and their support for victims being given an opportunity to inform offenders of the harm caused for theft/vandalism and assault offences. Females (assault offences only), and individuals who reported they had

Figure 1. Level of agreement for each restorative justice principle comparing theft/vandalism and assault offences

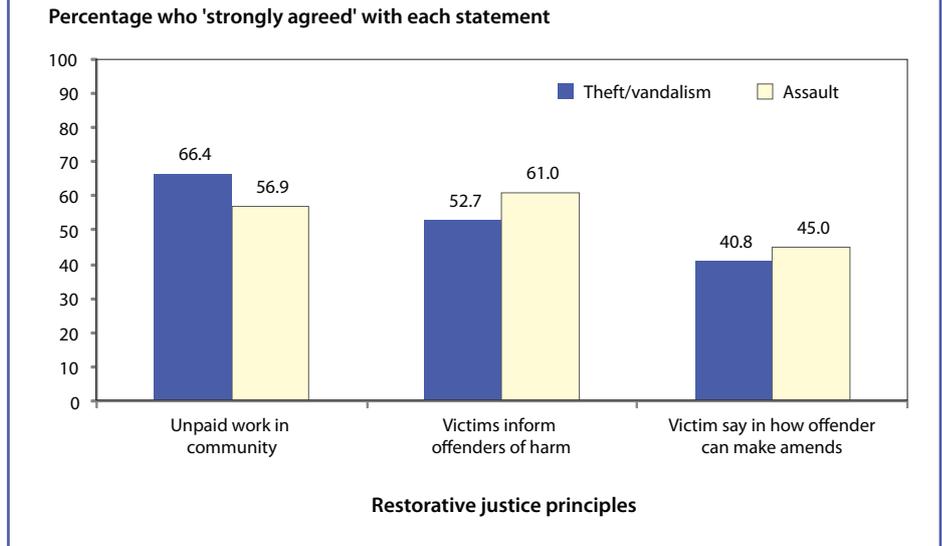


Figure 2. Perceived effectiveness of measures to prevent crime and disorder

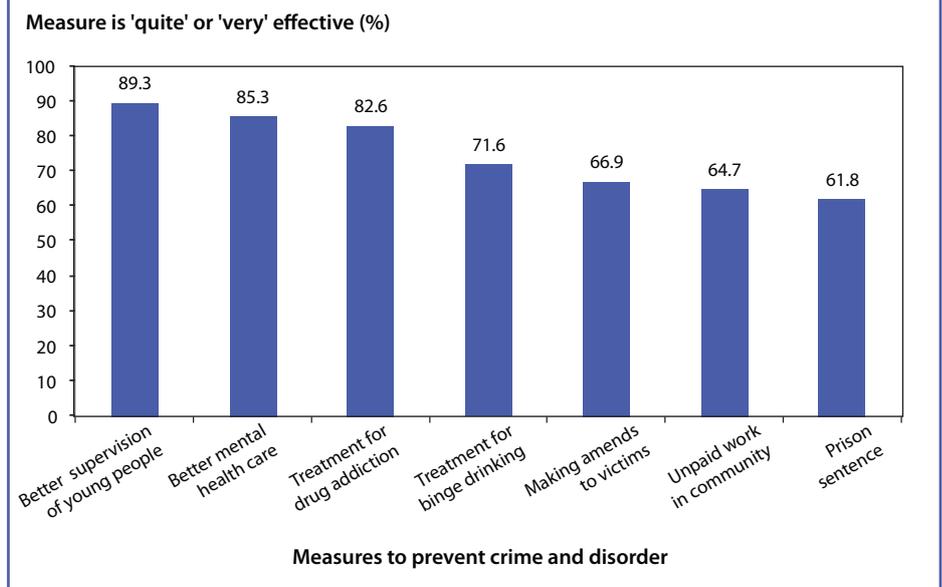


Table 3. Perceived effectiveness of measures to prevent crime and disorder (n = 2,530)

Measures to prevent crime/disorder	n	%	Comparison with 'unpaid work in the community' ^a	Comparison with 'making amends to victims' ^a
Better supervision of young people^b				
Very effective	1,542	62.1		
Quite effective	675	27.2		
Neither effective nor not effective	128	5.2	<i>p</i> < .001	<i>p</i> < .001
Not very effective	107	4.3		
Not at all effective	33	1.3		
Better mental health care^c				
Very effective	1,298	53.2		
Quite effective	783	32.1		
Neither effective nor not effective	179	7.3	<i>p</i> < .001	<i>p</i> < .001
Not very effective	137	5.6		
Not at all effective	42	1.7		
Treatment to tackle drug addiction^d				
Very effective	1,152	47.2		
Quite effective	864	35.4		
Neither effective nor not effective	175	7.2	<i>p</i> < .001	<i>p</i> < .001
Not very effective	175	7.3		
Not at all effective	73	3		
Treatment to tackle binge drinking^e				
Very effective	819	34.1		
Quite effective	902	37.5		
Neither effective nor not effective	242	10.1	<i>p</i> < .001	<i>p</i> < .001
Not very effective	314	13.1		
Not at all effective	128	5.3		
Making amends to victims^f				
Very effective	643	26.6		
Quite effective	976	40.3		
Neither effective nor not effective	302	12.5	<i>p</i> = .078	n/a
Not very effective	347	14.3		
Not at all effective	153	6.3		
Unpaid work in the community^g				
Very effective	664	27.1		
Quite effective	922	37.6		
Neither effective nor not effective	309	12.6	n/a	<i>p</i> = .078
Not very effective	380	15.5		
Not at all effective	176	7.2		
A prison sentence^h				
Very effective	634	26		
Quite effective	871	35.8		
Neither effective nor not effective	323	13.3	<i>p</i> < .010	<i>p</i> < .010
Not very effective	451	18.5		
Not at all effective	155	6.4		

^a *p*-value for McNemar test comparing restorative justice measures with other measures to prevent crime and disorder.

^b 2 respondents refused to answer, and 43 respondents answered 'don't know'.

^c 3 respondents refused to answer, and 88 respondents answered 'don't know'.

^d 4 respondent refused to answer, and 87 respondents answered 'don't know'.

^e 5 respondents refused to answer, and 120 respondents answered 'don't know'.

^f 4 respondents refused to answer, and 105 respondents answered 'don't know'.

^g 3 respondents refused to answer, and 76 respondents answered 'don't know'.

^h 3 respondent refused to answer, and 93 respondents answered 'don't know'.

Table 4. Respondent characteristics by level of agreement with offenders being required to do unpaid work in the community (n = 2,530)

Respondent characteristics	Theft/vandalism offences			Assault offences		
	Agree ^a	Neutral	Disagree ^b	Agree ^a	Neutral	Disagree ^b
	n (%)	n (%)	n (%)	n (%)	n (%)	n (%)
Sex						
Male	1,078 (88.4)	54 (4.4)	87 (7.1)	969 (79.3)	89 (7.3)	164 (13.4)
Female	1,205 (92.8)	39 (3.0)	54 (4.2)	1,063 (82.8)	74 (5.8)	147 (11.4)
			<i>p</i> < .001 ^c			<i>p</i> = .077 ^c
			Agree vs. Disagree <i>p</i> < .001 ^d			
			Agree vs. Neutral <i>p</i> < .050			
			Neutral vs. Disagree <i>p</i> = .578			
Age (years)						
18-34	432 (88.9)	23 (4.7)	31 (6.4)	369 (81.5)	45 (9.3)	45 (9.3)
35-54	881 (90.8)	41 (4.2)	48 (4.9)	763 (79.4)	68 (7.1)	130 (13.5)
55-64	439 (90.5)	19 (3.9)	27 (5.6)	392 (81.0)	34 (7.0)	58 (12.0)
65+	531 (92.2)	10 (1.7)	35 (6.1)	481 (83.7)	16 (2.8)	78 (13.6)
			<i>p</i> = .124 ^c			<i>p</i> < .001 ^c
						Agree vs. Disagree <i>p</i> = .160 ^d
						Agree vs. Neutral <i>p</i> < .001
						Neutral vs. Disagree <i>p</i> < .001
Region						
Sydney	1,508 (89.5)	70 (4.2)	107 (6.4)	1,351 (80.7)	105 (6.3)	219 (13.1)
Other NSW	775 (93.1)	23 (2.8)	34 (4.1)	681 (81.9)	58 (7.0)	92 (11.1)
			<i>p</i> < .050 ^c			<i>p</i> = .310 ^c
			Agree vs. Disagree <i>p</i> < .050 ^d			
			Agree vs. Neutral <i>p</i> = .065			
			Neutral vs. Disagree <i>p</i> = .914			
Education						
Degree	874 (88.7)	51 (5.2)	60 (6.1)	752 (76.7)	88 (9.0)	140 (14.3)
No degree	1,409 (92.0)	42 (2.7)	81 (5.3)	1,280 (83.9)	75 (4.9)	171 (11.2)
			<i>p</i> < .010 ^c			<i>p</i> < .001 ^c
			Agree vs. Disagree <i>p</i> = .312 ^d			Agree vs. Disagree <i>p</i> < .010 ^d
			Agree vs. Neutral <i>p</i> < .001			Agree vs. Neutral <i>p</i> < .001
			Neutral vs. Disagree <i>p</i> = .066			Neutral vs. Disagree <i>p</i> = .063
Current employment status						
Full-time	997 (90.7)	48 (4.4)	54 (4.9)	863 (78.7)	84 (7.7)	149 (13.6)
Part-time	456 (91.2)	19 (3.8)	25 (5.0)	410 (83.0)	33 (6.7)	51 (10.3)
Other	824 (90.5)	26 (2.9)	61 (6.7)	753 (82.8)	46 (5.1)	110 (12.1)
			<i>p</i> = .176 ^c			<i>p</i> < .050 ^c
						Agree vs. Disagree <i>p</i> = .134 ^d
						Agree vs. Neutral <i>p</i> < .050
						Neutral vs. Disagree <i>p</i> = .242
Marital status						
Single/never married	322 (88.7)	19 (5.2)	22 (6.1)	294 (81.2)	28 (7.7)	40 (11.0)
Married/defacto relationship	1,610 (90.9)	66 (3.7)	96 (5.4)	1,421 (80.6)	126 (7.1)	217 (12.3)
Divorced/separated/widowed	348 (91.8)	8 (2.1)	23 (6.1)	315 (83.6)	9 (2.4)	53 (14.1)
			<i>p</i> = .239 ^c			<i>p</i> < .010 ^c
						Agree vs. Disagree <i>p</i> = .639 ^d
						Agree vs. Neutral <i>p</i> < .010
						Neutral vs. Disagree <i>p</i> < .001
Ever been a victim of crime						
Yes	1,254 (90.0)	58 (4.2)	81 (5.8)	1,095 (79.1)	100 (7.2)	190 (13.7)
No	1,022 (91.7)	34 (3.0)	59 (5.3)	930 (83.6)	62 (5.6)	120 (10.8)
			<i>p</i> = .275 ^c			<i>p</i> < .050 ^c
						Agree vs. Disagree <i>p</i> < .050 ^d
						Agree vs. Neutral <i>p</i> = .060
						Neutral vs. Disagree <i>p</i> = .926
Perceived frequency of crimes occurring in neighbourhood						
Never/rarely	907 (91.4)	30 (3.0)	55 (5.5)	805 (81.1)	64 (6.4)	124 (12.5)
Sometimes	814 (90.4)	38 (4.2)	48 (5.3)	723 (81.0)	62 (6.9)	108 (12.1)
Frequently	490 (90.9)	18 (3.3)	31 (5.8)	439 (81.9)	29 (5.4)	68 (12.7)
			<i>p</i> = .708 ^c			<i>p</i> = .847 ^c
Perceived leniency/severity of sentences imposed by the courts						
Too lenient	1,451 (93.2)	36 (2.3)	70 (4.5)	1,321 (85.1)	70 (4.5)	162 (10.4)
About right	500 (85.3)	37 (6.3)	49 (8.4)	427 (72.6)	64 (10.9)	97 (16.5)
Too tough	47 (81.0)	6 (10.3)	5 (8.6)	39 (68.4)	5 (8.8)	13 (22.8)
			<i>p</i> < .001 ^c			<i>p</i> < .001 ^c
			Agree vs. Disagree <i>p</i> < .001 ^d			Agree vs. Disagree <i>p</i> < .001 ^d
			Agree vs. Neutral <i>p</i> < .001			Agree vs. Neutral <i>p</i> < .001
			Neutral vs. Disagree <i>p</i> = .242			Neutral vs. Disagree <i>p</i> = .122

^a Includes those who responded either 'strongly agree' or 'moderately agree'.

^b Includes those who responded either 'strongly disagree' or 'moderately disagree'.

^c *p*-value for chi-square test of association between respondent characteristics and level of agreement.

^d If the *p*-value for the chi-square test of association was <0.05, three post-hoc comparisons were conducted.

Table 5. Respondent characteristics by level of agreement with victims having opportunity to inform offender of harm caused (n=2,530)

Respondent characteristics	Theft/vandalism offences			Assault offences		
	Agree ^a	Neutral	Disagree ^b	Agree ^a	Neutral	Disagree ^b
	n (%)	n (%)	n (%)	n (%)	n (%)	n (%)
Sex						
Male	1,050 (85.6)	83 (6.8)	93 (7.6)	1,055 (86.1)	68 (5.6)	102 (8.3)
Female	1,125 (87.3)	82 (6.4)	82 (6.4)	1,164 (90.2)	51 (4.0)	76 (5.9)
			$p = .426^c$			$p < .010^c$
						Agree vs. Disagree $p < .050^d$
						Agree vs. Neutral $p < .050$
						Neutral vs. Disagree $p = .978$
Age (years)						
18-34	400 (82.3)	41 (8.4)	45 (9.3)	421 (86.4)	30 (6.2)	36 (7.4)
35-54	844 (87.1)	69 (7.1)	56 (5.8)	866 (89.6)	40 (4.1)	61 (6.3)
55-64	421 (87.0)	30 (6.2)	33 (6.8)	428 (89.0)	21 (4.4)	32 (6.7)
65+	510 (88.5)	25 (4.3)	41 (7.1)	504 (86.7)	28 (4.8)	49 (8.4)
			$p < .050^c$			$p = .420^c$
			Agree vs. Disagree $p = .087^d$			
			Agree vs. Neutral $p < .050$			
			Neutral vs. Disagree $p = .153$			
Region						
Sydney	1,453 (86.3)	107 (6.4)	124 (7.4)	1,481 (88.0)	81 (4.8)	121 (7.2)
Other NSW	722 (86.9)	58 (7.0)	51 (6.1)	738 (88.6)	38 (4.6)	57 (6.8)
			$p = .459^c$			$p = .909^c$
Education						
Degree	843 (85.7)	76 (7.7)	65 (6.6)	860 (87.7)	60 (6.1)	61 (6.2)
No degree	1,332 (87.0)	89 (5.8)	110 (7.2)	1,359 (88.5)	59 (3.8)	117 (7.6)
			$p = .154^c$			$p < .050^c$
						Agree vs. Disagree $p = .236^d$
						Agree vs. Neutral $p < .050$
						Neutral vs. Disagree $p < .010$
Current employment status						
Full-time	951 (86.5)	71 (6.5)	78 (7.1)	969 (88.3)	59 (5.4)	69 (6.3)
Part-time	423 (84.6)	43 (8.6)	34 (6.8)	447 (89.2)	16 (3.2)	38 (7.6)
Other	795 (87.6)	51 (5.6)	62 (6.8)	797 (87.5)	44 (4.8)	70 (7.7)
			$p = .308^c$			$p = .266^c$
Marital status						
Single/never married	300 (82.9)	30 (8.3)	32 (8.8)	324 (89.0)	19 (5.2)	21 (5.8)
Married/defaulto relationship	1,538 (86.9)	114 (6.4)	118 (6.7)	1,552 (87.7)	86 (4.9)	131 (7.4)
Divorced/separated/widowed	335 (88.2)	21 (5.5)	24 (6.3)	341 (89.7)	14 (3.7)	25 (6.6)
			$p = .258^c$			$p = .630^c$
Ever been a victim of crime						
Yes	1,217 (87.2)	97 (6.9)	82 (5.9)	1,245 (89.4)	64 (4.6)	84 (6.0)
No	951 (85.7)	67 (6.0)	92 (8.3)	966 (86.7)	55 (4.9)	93 (8.3)
			$p < .050^c$			$p = .069^c$
			Agree vs. Disagree $p < .050^d$			
			Agree vs. Neutral $p = .453$			
			Neutral vs. Disagree $p < .050$			
Perceived frequency of crimes occurring in neighbourhood						
Never/rarely	858 (86.2)	65 (6.5)	72 (7.2)	877 (88.1)	44 (4.4)	75 (7.5)
Sometimes	781 (87.3)	57 (6.4)	57 (6.4)	787 (88.0)	48 (5.4)	59 (6.6)
Frequently	464 (85.9)	34 (6.3)	42 (7.8)	481 (89.1)	23 (4.3)	36 (6.7)
			$p = .883^c$			$p = .741^c$
Perceived leniency/severity of sentences imposed by the courts						
Too lenient	1,361 (87.7)	80 (5.2)	111 (7.2)	1,399 (89.9)	54 (3.5)	103 (6.6)
About right	492 (83.8)	50 (8.5)	45 (7.7)	503 (85.5)	38 (6.5)	47 (8.0)
Too tough	47 (81.0)	6 (10.3)	5 (8.6)	51 (87.9)	4 (6.9)	3 (5.2)
			$p < .050^c$			$p < .050^c$
			Agree vs. Disagree $p = .731^d$			Agree vs. Disagree $p = .379^d$
			Agree vs. Neutral $p < .010$			Agree vs. Neutral $p < .010$
			Neutral vs. Disagree $p = .192$			Neutral vs. Disagree $p = .172$

^a Includes those who responded either 'strongly agree' or 'moderately agree'.

^b Includes those who responded either 'strongly disagree' or 'moderately disagree'.

^c p -value for chi-square test of association between respondent characteristics and level of agreement.

^d If the p -value for the chi-square test of association was <0.05 , three post-hoc comparisons were conducted.

Table 6. Respondent characteristics by level of agreement with victims having a say in how offender can make amends (n=2,530)

Respondent characteristics	Theft/vandalism offences			Assault offences		
	Agree ^a	Neutral	Disagree ^b	Agree ^a	Neutral	Disagree ^b
	n (%)	n (%)	n (%)	n (%)	n (%)	n (%)
Sex						
Male	878 (71.7)	97 (7.9)	249 (20.3)	909 (74.6)	92 (7.5)	218 (17.9)
Female	958 (74.4)	108 (8.4)	221 (17.2)	958 (74.4)	102 (7.9)	228 (17.7)
			<i>p</i> = .125 ^c			<i>p</i> = .939 ^c
Age (years)						
18-34	341 (69.9)	53 (10.9)	94 (19.3)	362 (74.6)	44 (9.1)	79 (16.3)
35-54	710 (73.3)	83 (8.6)	175 (18.1)	725 (75.1)	75 (7.8)	165 (17.1)
55-64	363 (75.2)	36 (7.5)	84 (17.4)	352 (72.7)	37 (7.6)	95 (19.6)
65+	422 (73.8)	33 (5.8)	117 (20.5)	428 (74.7)	38 (6.6)	107 (18.7)
			<i>p</i> = .073 ^c			<i>p</i> = .632 ^c
Region						
Sydney	1,211 (72.1)	142 (8.5)	326 (19.4)	1,225 (72.9)	128 (7.6)	327 (19.5)
Other NSW	625 (75.1)	63 (7.6)	144 (17.3)	642 (77.6)	66 (8.0)	119 (14.4)
			<i>p</i> = .281 ^c			<i>p</i> < .010 ^c
						Agree vs. Disagree <i>p</i> < .010 ^d
						Agree vs. Neutral <i>p</i> = .919
						Neutral vs. Disagree <i>p</i> = .060
Education						
Degree	651 (66.2)	112 (11.4)	220 (22.4)	672 (68.3)	92 (9.3)	220 (22.4)
No degree	1,185 (77.6)	93 (6.1)	250 (16.4)	1,195 (78.5)	102 (6.7)	226 (14.8)
			<i>p</i> < .001 ^c			<i>p</i> < .001 ^c
			Agree vs. Disagree <i>p</i> < .001 ^d			Agree vs. Disagree <i>p</i> < .001 ^d
			Agree vs. Neutral <i>p</i> < .001			Agree vs. Neutral <i>p</i> < .001
			Neutral vs. Disagree <i>p</i> = .061			Neutral vs. Disagree <i>p</i> = .242
Current employment status						
Full-time	781 (71.1)	100 (9.1)	217 (19.8)	804 (73.6)	88 (8.1)	200 (18.3)
Part-time	374 (74.5)	46 (9.2)	82 (16.3)	380 (76.0)	40 (8.0)	80 (16.0)
Other	675 (74.7)	58 (6.4)	171 (18.9)	677 (74.6)	65 (7.2)	166 (18.3)
			<i>p</i> = .078 ^c			<i>p</i> = .730 ^c
Marital status						
Single/never married	265 (72.8)	33 (9.1)	66 (18.1)	266 (73.7)	40 (11.1)	55 (15.2)
Married/defacto relationship	1,273 (72.0)	157 (8.9)	337 (19.1)	1,305 (73.8)	136 (7.7)	327 (18.5)
Divorced/separated/widowed	296 (78.5)	15 (4.0)	66 (17.5)	294 (78.4)	18 (4.8)	63 (16.8)
			<i>p</i> < .050 ^c			<i>p</i> < .050 ^c
			Agree vs. Disagree <i>p</i> = .504 ^d			Agree vs. Disagree <i>p</i> = .339 ^d
			Agree vs. Neutral <i>p</i> < .010			Agree vs. Neutral <i>p</i> < .010
			Neutral vs. Disagree <i>p</i> < .050			Neutral vs. Disagree <i>p</i> < .050
Ever been a victim of crime						
Yes	1,020 (73.1)	114 (8.2)	261 (18.7)	1,022 (73.5)	118 (8.5)	250 (18.0)
No	809 (73.1)	91 (8.2)	207 (18.7)	837 (75.5)	76 (6.9)	195 (17.6)
			<i>p</i> = .999 ^c			<i>p</i> = .287 ^c
Perceived frequency of crimes occurring in neighbourhood						
Never/rarely	711 (71.7)	82 (8.3)	198 (20.0)	718 (72.5)	86 (8.7)	187 (18.9)
Sometimes	650 (72.4)	77 (8.6)	171 (19.0)	659 (73.5)	69 (7.7)	168 (18.8)
Frequently	419 (77.9)	35 (6.5)	84 (15.6)	436 (81.0)	32 (5.9)	70 (13.0)
			<i>p</i> = .107 ^c			<i>p</i> < .010 ^c
						Agree vs. Disagree <i>p</i> < .010 ^d
						Agree vs. Neutral <i>p</i> = .074
						Neutral vs. Disagree <i>p</i> = .827
Perceived leniency/severity of sentences imposed by the courts						
Too lenient	1,225 (78.8)	93 (6.0)	236 (15.2)	1,239 (80.0)	100 (6.5)	209 (13.5)
About right	370 (63.6)	60 (10.3)	152 (26.1)	381 (64.8)	56 (9.5)	151 (25.7)
Too tough	38 (65.5)	6 (10.3)	14 (24.1)	39 (67.2)	5 (8.6)	14 (24.1)
			<i>p</i> < .001 ^c			<i>p</i> < .001 ^c
			Agree vs. Disagree <i>p</i> < .001 ^d			Agree vs. Disagree <i>p</i> < .001 ^d
			Agree vs. Neutral <i>p</i> < .001			Agree vs. Neutral <i>p</i> < .010
			Neutral vs. Disagree <i>p</i> = .986			Neutral vs. Disagree <i>p</i> = .408

^a Includes those who responded either 'strongly agree' or 'moderately agree'.

^b Includes those who responded either 'strongly disagree' or 'moderately disagree'.

^c *p*-value for chi-square test of association between respondent characteristics and level of agreement.

^d If the *p*-value for the chi-square test of association was <0.05, three post-hoc comparisons were conducted.

been a victim of a crime (theft/vandalism offences only) were significantly more likely to agree (compared to disagree) that victims should be given the opportunity to inform offenders of the harm caused.

Table 6 shows the relationship between the respondents' socio-demographic characteristics and support for allowing victims a say in how the offender can make amends for the harm caused. Individuals living outside of Sydney (assault offences only), those without a degree (theft/vandalism and assault offences), those who perceived crimes to occur frequently in their neighbourhood (assault offences only), and those who perceived the sentences imposed by the courts as too lenient (theft/vandalism and assault offences), were significantly more likely to agree (compared to disagree) that victims should be given a say in how the offender can make amends.

Discussion

There is widespread support amongst NSW residents for restorative justice initiatives dealing with theft/vandalism and assault offences. Combining the survey results for both offence types, more than eight out of 10 respondents agreed that offenders should be required to do unpaid work in the community as part of their sentence (85.9%), and that victims should be given the opportunity to inform offenders of the harm caused (87.3%). While not as overwhelming, the majority of the sample (73.8%) also endorsed allowing victims to have a say in how the offender can make amends for the harm caused. The restorative justice initiatives, 'making amends to victims' and 'unpaid work in the community' were perceived as *less* effective in preventing crime and disorder compared to the initiatives of 'better supervision of young people by parents', 'better mental health care', 'treatment to tackle drug addiction' and 'treatment to tackle binge drinking'. However, 'making amends to victims' and 'unpaid work in the community' were perceived as *more* effective in preventing crime and disorder compared to receiving 'a prison sentence'. The most consistent socio-demographic characteristics associated with support for restorative justice were being female, not having a degree, living outside of Sydney, and believing that the sentences imposed by the courts are 'too lenient'.

Overall, the results are fairly consistent with the UK survey (Prison Reform Trust, 2011) which also identified overwhelming public support for restorative justice initiatives in relation to theft/vandalism offences. Ninety-four per cent (compared to 91% in the NSW sample) of the UK sample agreed offenders should be required as part of their sentence to do unpaid work in the community, the same proportion (87% in both surveys) agreed victims should be given the opportunity to inform offenders of the harm caused, and 72 per cent (compared to 73% in the NSW sample) agreed victims should have a say in how the offender can make amends for the harm caused. As in the current survey, the UK sample rated 'better supervision of young people by parents' as the most effective way to prevent crime and disorder. The proportions indicating the perceived effectiveness of the restorative justice initiatives ('making amends to victims' and 'unpaid work in the community')

were rated more highly in the UK sample compared to the current NSW sample (79% vs. 67%; 76% vs. 65%), particularly in comparison to the other measures suggested to prevent crime and disorder (i.e., 'treatment to tackle drug addiction' and 'treatment to tackle binge drinking').

The use of a telephone survey makes it impossible to say how precisely the results reflect the views of NSW or other Australian residents. This is because some subgroups are necessarily omitted from surveys of this nature (e.g., those who do not own a fixed line telephone and those who do not speak English). It is reassuring to note that use of the sample weights made very little difference to the proportions of the sample endorsing each item of interest. This suggests the demographic characteristics of the current sample adequately reflect those of the wider population and that the bias introduced by not utilising sample weights would have been negligible. It should also be pointed out that opinion polls, which use the same methodology, usually predict election outcomes within a small margin of error. This suggests that random digit dialling methodologies typically capture a representative cohort of the population.

Conclusion

Importantly, the results provide new knowledge on public support for restorative justice initiatives especially given the limited prior research. The results support previous findings which suggest that while public perceptions of sentences imposed by the courts are generally of the view that they are 'too lenient', when specifically asked to consider alternatives, such as restorative justice initiatives, high levels of agreement are observed. Given the overwhelming support for the restorative justice initiatives assessed, future research may benefit from exploring why such measures are typically viewed as not as effective in preventing crime and disorder. Improving public awareness of restorative justice initiatives may also aid in enhancing victim attendance at youth justice conferences.

Acknowledgements

The author would like to acknowledge the services of Taverners Research, particularly Don Porritt for his advice on various aspects of the methodology and for managing the data collection process. The authors would also like to thank Nadine Smith, Craig Jones, Don Weatherburn, Deborah Bradford and Lily Trimboli for comments on earlier drafts of this bulletin, and Florence Sin for desktop publishing.

Notes

1. For example, jurisdictional variation exists in the types of eligible offences; whether the program is applicable to only first-time or all juvenile offenders; whether the program is used as a pre-sentencing option rather than alternative to court; and whether the program is administered by the state police department or by another government department or independent agency.
2. Of the 15,618 randomly generated telephone numbers that were dialled for this survey, contact was made with 9,218 (59.0%) households. Of the 6,400 numbers where no contact was made, 1,258 (19.7%) had invalid phone numbers, 873 (13.6%) numbers were either a fax, data line or business number, 2,582 (40.3%) were unavailable or unsuccessful after five attempts, and for 1,687 (26.4%) no contact was made by the end of the survey period (i.e., the number was still considered "active" as fewer than five attempts had been made) due to an answering machine, phone engaged or no answer.
3. Mixed rules for selecting a respondent from within a household were used to partly overcome the age and gender bias associated with the use of random selection rules (i.e., where a participant is chosen at random from a household) which tend to over-represent females and those aged 55 years or more, and under-represent those aged under 35 years.
4. Weighted data increases the standard error of the estimate (thereby reducing statistical power) and would give very little reduction in possible bias if there are negligible differences on the demographic variables from the population. While survey weights were provided they were not utilised in the analyses as there was little difference between the demographic sub-groups.
5. Assault was defined in the survey as an incident, other than a robbery, where the victim was physically attacked or threatened with force or violence.

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