

# Promoting Inmates' Positive Attitudes toward Participating in a Restorative Justice Process: The Effects of a Victim Awareness Process

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## Abstract

In the present study, we conducted an empirical experiment to examine whether exposure to a victim awareness procedure would affect inmates' attitudes toward participating in a restorative-justice process. In addition, the study sought to evaluate whether there are differences between inmates serving their sentences in prisons with different therapeutic orientations. The findings indicate that participants who were exposed to a victim awareness procedure were more aware of the harm caused to the victim and showed a higher level of positive attitudes toward participating in restorative-justice process than those who were not. Contrary to our hypothesis, no differences were found between the prisons.

## Keywords

restorative justice, victim awareness procedure, victim-offender mediation

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## **Introduction**

Numerous studies have shown that retributive justice (and imprisonment) is crucial to the sense of fairness felt by the public following a criminal act (e.g., Fehr & Fischbacher, 2004; Gromet & Darley, 2009; Vidmar & Miller, 1980). This research also indicates that even when people have not been directly victimized by the crime, they are still anxious to punish the lawbreaker. Walmsley (2013) estimated that about 10.2 million people worldwide were imprisoned in a variety of detention facilities, and that the prison population on all five continents has increased more rapidly than the growth of the general population. Nevertheless, the aspiration to achieve justice by relying on a retributive justice system alone is problematic. According to recent criminological research, it appears that law enforcement systems all over the world are increasingly using outdated methods of punishment that are ineffective in terms of deterrence, rehabilitation, offender reentry into society, and in economic costs (Carroll & Warner, 2014; Jewkes & Johnston, 2006). In addition, many researchers argue that conventional retributive justice does not provide a sufficient response to the needs and fears of the victims and those around them (Barton, 1999; Gromet & Darley, 2009; O'Hear, 2006; Strang & Sherman, 2003). Consequently, in recent years, law enforcement and social supervision in many countries, including Israel, appear to have become more aware of alternative methods for dealing with criminal offenses.

## **Restorative Justice**

Many of the new alternatives being examined internationally are based on the concept of restorative justice (RJ). The main goal of RJ is to redress the harm caused and/or resolve the dispute by identifying the needs resulting from the criminal act. According to the RJ approach, this can be achieved by holding an unprejudiced guided discussion between the parties affected by the criminal behavior with the aim of coming to agreements on what the offender, and sometimes the community, should do to address the needs of those who suffered as a result of the criminal offense (Johnstone, 2012; Zehr & Mika, 2003). During this process, offenders must come to terms with the results of their actions and the suffering they have caused, and to become aware of opportunities to rectify the harm caused. Alleviating the harm can be achieved if the offender recognizes the damage they have caused and the extreme hardships experienced by the victim and others who have been impacted by the offense(s); the offender has to accept responsibility for their actions and be willing to address the needs that have become salient as a result (Farkash, 2009; Roche, 2003).

The "classic" use of RJ implies an alternative to imprisonment, and some scholars view RJ as being in opposition to retributive punishment (Bazemore, 1998;

Walgrave, 2004). However, in recent years, a number of researchers and proponents of RJ have reached the conclusion that it is reasonable to assume that prisons will not disappear in the near future and, for some offenders, there is still no appropriate alternative to imprisonment. Consequently, in many instances, an appropriate solution is to bring RJ into the prisons so that offenders and their victims can take advantage of its numerous benefits (Dhami et al., 2009; Edgar & Newell, 2006; Van Ness, 2007; Wallace & Wylie, 2014).

## **RJ During Imprisonment**

The integration of restorative processes in prisons can help inmates to understand the harm they have caused and the needs of the victim and others affected by the criminal act. Inmates have to accept responsibility for their actions, and have an opportunity to “make amends” in various ways, for example, by giving the victim a nominal monetary compensation, an apology, or by means of community service (Mace, 2000; Newell, 2001). In addition, RJ processes can engender a positive offender self-image and contribute to social skills’ enhancements for reintegration into society. Certain RJ procedures such as victim-offender mediation or conferencing may even help victims to cope with their continuing feelings of victimhood and reduce fears and antagonism in the community. Relations between the prison and the community, supported by some RJ processes (e.g., community service work or cooperative workshops for prisoners and community members which are sometimes performed as part of the RJ process), facilitate awareness and understanding among community members concerning what happens within the prison walls. In addition, inmate participation in RJ helps to improve skills required for effective non-violent conflict management, raised in discussions of wishes and needs (Dhami et al., 2009). Furthermore, these skills can be applied to in-prison conflicts, both between inmates and staff and between inmates. RJ processes can also advance a more positive prison social climate (Butler & Maruna, 2016; Newell, 2002).

Another important factor supporting restorative action during incarceration pertains to the great challenge facing the released former offender upon returning to their family and community. During incarceration, offenders are not required to deal with the situations that predated their offense and prison term. However, upon release, they must face social and interpersonal challenges, including having to contend with dilemmas and exclusion from family and community. Such rejection can lead to recidivism (Fox, 2014). Therefore, RJ in prison settings supports offender therapeutic rehabilitation and better reintegration into society (Dhami et al., 2009).

Despite the advantages of employing RJ practices during incarceration, one must first ascertain inmate willingness to participate in them. For example, Stamatakis and Vandeviver (2013) conducted research in Belgium where there

is a strong tradition of RJ practice in prison and found inmate readiness to participate was very high (60.6%). In addition, when inmates participated in previous restorative processes, particularly programs that raised victim awareness and the harm caused to them, their readiness was even higher (88.5%). Clearly, offender awareness of victim harm and its extent was crucial in increasing participant readiness and commitment to the restorative program. As the research was a preliminary study conducted in Belgium where restorative detention is involved in all prison sectors, the authors themselves caution that it is important to test their findings in other societies. This is the aim of the present study.

## **The Present Study**

In a previous study (Peleg-Koriat & Weimann Saks, 2019), we examined the attitudes of offenders serving sentences in Israeli prisons toward their possible participation in an RJ program. We found that the incarcerated were very willing to express contrition, meet with victims, and do volunteer work in the community. Furthermore, our findings showed a strong positive correlation between the inmate's thoughts about the victim and the offense, the harm caused, and their readiness to participate in the RJ program. However, the results also indicated that less than half of those who took part in this study acknowledged that the victim himself was harmed by the offense. We believe this finding justifies the need for RJ and victim awareness programming in prisons and in the criminal justice system at large.

Thus, drawing on the Belgian study and our own research in Israel, there is a real need to raise the offender's awareness of the victim's story, their needs, and the extent to which their family and community have been harmed. Nevertheless, at times, practical, budgetary, and other limitations (e.g., a short prison sentence) prevent advancement of RJ programs, including a long and expensive therapeutic process. Thus, our objective here was to conduct an empirical experiment in order to test for the first time whether exposure to a partial and easy-to-manage victim awareness procedure (exposure to the story of an indirect victim of an offense) would lead to a higher level of victim awareness and the harm caused by the criminal act, as well as an increase in their willingness to participate in additional and full restorative processes—for example, direct or indirect meetings with victims or surrogate victims. In other words, the aim of the present study was to investigate whether indirect exposure to victims' stories and their needs, stemming from the harm caused by the offense, was sufficient to lead to real change in inmates' attitudes and their willingness to take action to redress the harm.

Another aim was to investigate whether attitudes toward participating in a restorative process (direct or indirect meetings with victims or surrogate victims) varied among inmates incarcerated in two different prisons, each with a

different therapeutic-rehabilitative orientation—comparing the only prison in Israel defined as having a full therapeutic-rehabilitative orientation (a rehabilitative prison) and a regular prison.<sup>1</sup> It is important to note that some of the detainees in the regular prison do receive some therapeutic-rehabilitative care, but unlike the rehabilitative prison, this is not part of a program in which prisoners are required to participate. As such, care is not part of the prison's general approach. In contrast, in the rehabilitative prison, every inmate is involved in a full therapeutic process designed to meet their needs on a regular basis, and this is part of the "essence" of the prison. A prisoner who does not wish to receive such care cannot be incarcerated in the rehabilitative prison.

Every prisoner accepted into the rehabilitative prison is interviewed by a reception committee a week after arrival. This committee determines inmate placement in accordance with their skills, abilities, talents, and needs. Some newcomers are assigned to formal educational frameworks, while others work or attend workshops. Importantly, work and study take place only during morning hours, and there are no individual or group therapy sessions during these activities. In addition, unlike other prisons, the rehabilitative prison has a rural atmosphere, including wide lawns and landscaping, and the buildings are quite modern and spacious.

Thus, it is reasonable to hypothesize that offenders serving their sentences in the rehabilitative prison will express greater positive attitudes toward participation in RJ processes than prisoners in the regular prison who are not exposed to a general therapeutic-rehabilitative approach. In contrast, it may be further hypothesized that exposure to RJ processes (exposure to the story of an indirect victim) will have a greater effect on inmates in the regular prison who do not undergo daily individual and group therapy.

In conducting the current study, we examined whether partial indirect RJ processes (exposure to a video in which the victim of a criminal offense tells her personal story) would affect inmates' attitudes toward participation in RJ processes. In addition, the investigation also attempted to examine whether attitudes toward participation in RJ processes were different among prisoners serving their sentences in prisons which were different in type and in therapeutic orientation.

We therefore hypothesized that

**Hypothesis 1:** A correlation will be found between participation in a victim awareness procedure (exposed to the video of the victim's story) and awareness of the harm caused to the victim.

**Hypothesis 2:** Difference in attitudes toward participation in RJ processes would be found between participants who took part in a victim awareness procedure (exposed to the video of the victim's story) and those who did not. Participants who took part in a victim awareness procedure will have higher levels of positive attitudes toward participation in RJ processes than those who did not.

**Hypothesis 3:** Differences would be found between participants in two types of prisons regarding attitudes toward RJ processes (direct or indirect meetings with victims or surrogate victims such as victim-offender mediation or conferencing), with a higher level of positive attitudes toward participation in RJ processes in the rehabilitative prison than among participants in the regular prison.

**Hypothesis 4:** Differences would be found between participants who took part in a victim awareness procedure and participants who did not in their attitudes toward RJ processes, with a greater difference among participants from the regular prison than among participants from the rehabilitative prison.

## Method

### *Participants' Selection*

The study was designed as a parallel two-group randomized controlled trial. Those who agreed to participate in the study were asked to meet in the prison yard and were randomly assigned to two groups. The first participant was assigned to the experimental group, the second was assigned to control group, and so on. No differences were found between the groups in the demographic variables such as *age*,  $t(130) = 0.941, p > .05$ ; *number of children*,  $t(128) = 0.336, p > .05$ ; *current term of imprisonment*,  $t(131) = -0.266, p > .05$ ; *number of previous imprisonments*,  $t(131) = 0.302, p > .05$ ; and *remaining imprisonment term*,  $t(131) = 0.622, p > .05$ . In addition, a similar distribution was found for the qualitative variables: religious, level of religiosity, type of offense, participation in prison's therapeutic program, education level, and marital status.

### *Participants*

The participants in the study were 133 male prisoners from two Israeli prisons: a rehabilitative prison ( $n = 68$ ) and a regular prison ( $n = 65$ ). Their ages ranged from 19 to 72 years ( $M = 37.54, SD = 12.23$ ). The majority of the participants were Muslims (60.8%), and most of them (42.2%) were religious or traditional (37.5%). Most (51.8%) were married; most had completed an elementary (32.8%) or high school education (28.4%); 17.4% had received an academic education. For 61.1%, this was their first prison term, and 38.9% had been in prison before. The average period of imprisonment was 40.45 months ( $SD = 49.01$ ). The longest sentence was 480 months, and the shortest was 1 month. Most of the participants were serving the first half of their sentence (see Table 1).

**Table 1.** Descriptive Statistics for the Sample ( $N = 133$ ).

		n	%	
Prison	Rehabilitative	68	51.1	
	Regular	65	48.9	
Participation in prison's therapeutic program	Yes	107	89.2	
	No	13	10.8	
Type of offense	Drugs	10	7.9	
	Property	11	8.7	
	Assault	9	7.1	
	Violence	26	20.5	
	Family	11	4.7	
	Sex	6	8.7	
	Traffic	29	22.8	
	Other	25	19.7	
Religion	Jewish	36	28.8	
	Muslim	76	60.8	
	Christian	10	8.0	
	Other	3	2.4	
Religiosity	Religious	46	42.2	
	Traditional	41	37.5	
	Non-religious	22	20.3	
Family Status	Married	55	51.8	
	Divorced	15	14.2	
	Single	31	29	
	Widow	6	5.6	
	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	SD
Age (years)	19	72	37.54	12.23
Number of children	0	10	2.41	2.34
Current term of imprisonment (months)	1	480	40.45	49.01
Number of previous imprisonments	0	9	2.32	2.06
Remaining imprisonment (months)	1	101	21.18	17.41

## Procedure

Half of the participants (the “experimental group,”  $n = 67$ ) were shown a short video (approximately 15 min) in which a young woman, the victim of a criminal act, related her personal story involving a violent robbery at her father's grocery store, during which she was seriously injured. The video was

shown to the experimental group on a television in the prison library, and the group watched it together. About an hour after watching the video, the participants completed questionnaires (in Hebrew or Arabic).

The other half of the participants (the "control group,"  $n = 66$ ) did not watch the video and only completed questionnaires. The survey was anonymous, and the response time was approximately 20 min. The survey was carried out at a time when there was no other activity in the prison. Participants were told that participation was voluntary and that they were free to refuse our request to participate in the study. It was also explained that the survey was conducted anonymously, that the prison staff would not be exposed to their answers, and that they were asked not to indicate any identifying details. This research procedure was approved by the Institutional Ethics Committee and the Israel Prison Service Ethics Committee.

## **Materials**

### *Manipulation*

The experimental group ( $n = 67$ ) watched a short video (the video included 1,770 words) featuring the personal monologue of a young woman who described her experience of being involved in a criminal offense which took place at her father's grocery store, as a result of which her father remained unconscious and in a vegetative state. She excitedly described what she had experienced, and her feelings at the time of the offense and afterwards (expressing her sense of fear, anxiety, and distress). In the video, the young woman raises questions resulting from her experience, including: "Why did it have to happen to us?" "What would have happened if I hadn't come into the room?" "Did the offender know my father?" and "Is he aware of the harm he caused?" The young woman tries to guess who the offender was and what motivated him to commit the crime ("Maybe he was a drug addict, and then the government is responsible for not rehabilitating him. Maybe he was ill and unfortunate and needed help?"). The woman relates that since the incident she is having trouble functioning. Her father's grocery store has closed down, her mother was diagnosed with cancer, and the family is now suffering from financial problems. She is afraid to walk the streets alone, and her family has been unable to resume a normal life. At the end of the video, the young woman expresses her desire to understand and receive answers to all her questions so that she and her family can move on with their lives, and so that her mother can receive explanations before she dies.



**Table 2.** The Statements Construct the Index Variable “Attitude Towards RJ” (Scale Ranging From 1 = *Strongly Disagree* to 6 = *Strongly Agree*) ( $N = 133$ ,  $\alpha = .87$ ).

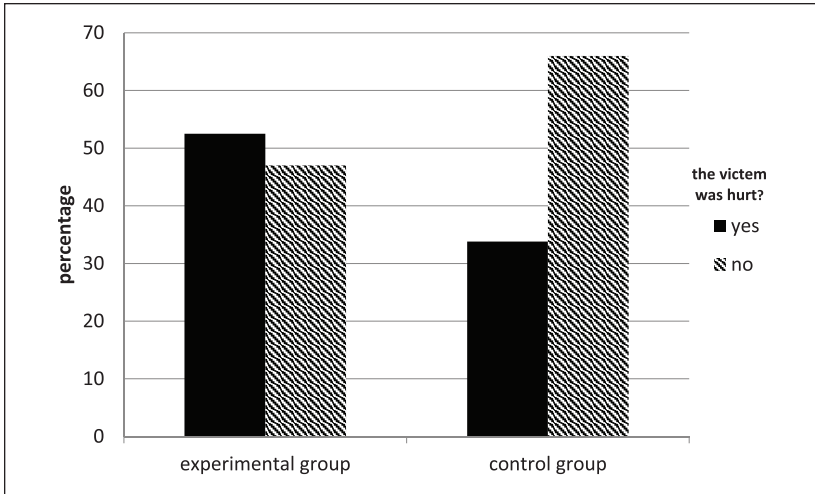
The variable	M	SD
I would like to meet the people who were personally affected by the offense I committed.	4.23	1.93
I would like to meet people who have been affected by the type of offense I am in prison for.	4.22	1.87
I would like to write a letter to the victim of the offense I committed.	3.96	1.99
It is appropriate to hold meetings between prisoners and their victims.	4.37	1.76
I have things to say to the victim of my offense.	4.47	1.91
I think about the harm my behavior caused to my family.	4.16	1.96
I regret the behaviors for which I am in prison today.	5.51	1.27
I accept responsibility for the acts I committed and for which I am in prison.	5.54	1.31

**Questionnaires.** All participants responded to the following parts: demographic questions, details about their offense and the sentence (who was hurt by the offense, length of imprisonment, remaining prison term, offense for which he was imprisoned) and an “attitude towards RJ processes” questionnaire.

**Attitude toward RJ processes.** To assess attitude toward RJ processes (direct or indirect meetings with victims or surrogate victims), we used an 8-item scale ( $\alpha = .87$ ) (ranging from 1 = *strongly disagree* to 6 = *strongly agree*), based on the scale used in Dinsdale (2001) with a few changes. The instructions directed the participants to indicate the extent to which they agreed with the eight statements about RJ. The variable was constructed from the average of the eight statements (see Table 2).

## Results

To examine H1 regarding the correlation between the participation in a victim awareness procedure (exposure to the video of the victim’s story) and awareness of the harm caused to the victim, we used a chi-square test and discovered significant correlation,  $\chi^2(1) = 4.45$ ,  $\phi = 0.188$ ,  $p < .05$ . More participants who had participated in a victim awareness procedure (experimental group) were aware of the harm caused to the victim [52.5%] than participants who had not participated [33.8%] (see Figure 1).

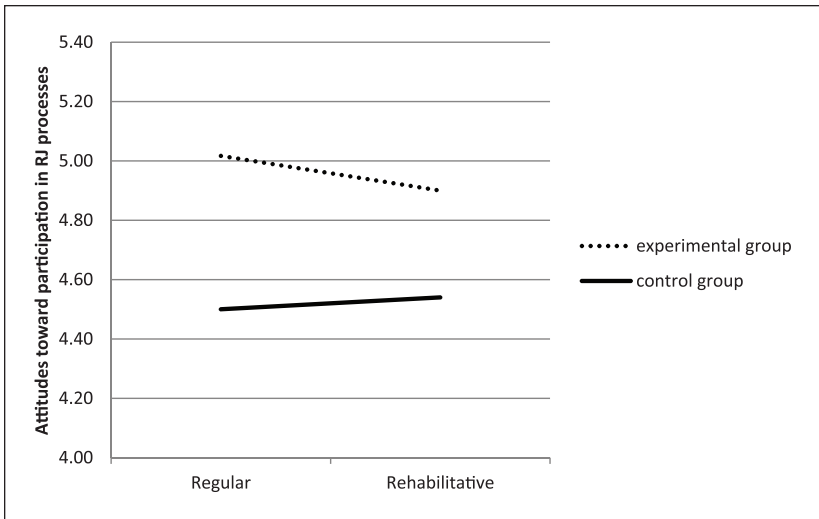


**Figure 1.** Awareness of the harm caused to the victim according to the experimental conditions.

A two-way ANOVA was performed to examine the effect of participation in a victim awareness procedure (H2) and type of prison (H3), and the interaction between the variables (H4) on attitude toward RJ processes. In accordance with hypothesis H2, a simple main effect analysis showed significant effect for participation in a victim awareness procedure,  $F(1, 132) = 5.05, p = .026, \eta^2 = .038$ . Participants who viewed the video indicated higher levels of positive attitudes toward participation in RJ processes ( $M = 4.95, SD = 1.01$ ) than participants who did not view the video ( $M = 4.52, SD = 1.18$ ). Contrary to hypothesis H3, the second simple main effect analysis did not show significant effect for type of prison,  $F(1, 132) = 0.06, p = .816, \eta^2 = .000$ . As to H4, the analysis did not reveal interaction between the effect of participation in a victim awareness procedure and the type of prison,  $F(1, 132) = 0.17, p = .680, \eta^2 = .001$  (see Figure 2).

## Discussion

The aim of the present study was to examine whether exposure to a victim awareness procedure (i.e., viewing a short video in which the victim of a criminal offense tells her personal story) would affect the attitudes of inmates toward participating in RJ processes. In addition, the study sought to evaluate



**Figure 2.** Interaction between the effect of participation in a victim awareness procedure and prison type on attitudes toward participation in RJ processes. Note. RJ = restorative justice.

whether readiness and willingness to participate in RJ processes were different among inmates serving their terms in different prisons with different rehabilitation orientations.

The research findings indicate that participants who were exposed to the experimental video were more aware of the victim’s suffering than participants who were not. By employing this simple exposure to the story of a victim (who was actually an indirect victim), we heightened the inmates’ awareness of the harm she had experienced. Heightening of awareness is an important stage in rehabilitation in general and in motivating the inmate toward restorative processes in particular (Stamatakis & Vandeviver, 2013).

In accordance with the hypothesis, participants who were exposed to a victim awareness procedure showed a higher of positive attitude toward participation in RJ processes than participants who did not. However, contrary to our hypothesis, no differences were found between the rehabilitative prison and the regular prison. The absence of differences in the inmates’ reaction in the two prisons attests to the fact that, at present, even in a therapeutic and rehabilitative prison in Israel, the rehabilitative programs are not directed toward the victim and the relationship between the offender and victim. It appears that despite the numerous advantages of rehabilitative prisons, they do not enable discourse between the offender and the victim, and do not

encourage prisoners to undertake restorative processes, including inclusion of the victims and the community.

The present study has several important implications on theoretical and practical levels. On the theoretical level, this pioneering study examined experimentally the effect of exposing prisoners serving their sentences (in rehabilitative and regular prisons) to a victim awareness procedure. The fact that the experiment was conducted in real prisons and involved real inmates who were actively exposed to a real RJ process, rather than a simulation of these situations, strengthens the reinforced external validity of the study, thus enabling better generalization of the study's findings regarding inmates' attitudes toward RJ.

The current study addresses knowledge limitations in the literature regarding the importance of treatment programs designed to raise inmates' awareness of the victim and the harm caused by the offense. Previous studies investigated programs carried out within prisons and designed to raise the profile of the harm caused to the victim and the offender's responsibility, whether as part of a comprehensive program to implement prison-oriented RJ or programs whose declared aim is raising awareness of the victim (e.g., Barr, 2013 [Northern Ireland]; Dhami et al., 2009 [United Kingdom]; Ellis, 2011 [Ohio]; Hagemann, 2012 [Germany]; Robert & Peters, 2002 [Belgium]; Suttie, 2015 [California]. For example, Barr (2013) proposed that ". . . a compelling need exists to understand the dynamics of permitting victims of crime a 'voice' inside custodial settings" (p. 390). Barr investigated whether taking part in two restorative initiatives at Magilligan prison in Northern Ireland, one involving direct victims and another employing community members as facilitators, could encourage victims' perceptions of procedural fairness and offenders' perceptions of the legitimacy of their sentence. Barr (2013) found that both objectives were positively achieved.

The study attempts to expand the existing literature in this realm as it investigates, for the first time, restorative processes in Israel, a country that has no restorative programs in its prisons. It examined the effectiveness of these processes in raising the offender's awareness of a victim's story and the extent of the harm caused to them, as a preliminary step toward a restorative process of arranging a meeting between the offender and the victim. The findings support the research hypothesis, and indicate that exposure to the victim's voice, even if it takes place by means of an indirect restorative process, is very significant in establishing willingness and readiness to participate in restorative processes. A general statement by the offender of accepting responsibility is not sufficient for establishing readiness to participate in a restorative meeting. The offender has to acknowledge the harm caused as a preliminary condition for a restorative process.

Beyond the theoretical contribution, this research also contributes on a practical level. As stated in the literature review, when researchers first began engaging with and investigating the RJ approach, it was presented as being essentially different and in complete opposition to the punishment approach. Over the years, as the RJ approach developed, the research literature and the actual practice of RJ searched for ways to combine the restorative approach with accepted judicial practices (Braithwaite, 1999; Gavrielides & Worth, 2013).

Criminal justice is a significant discussion platform for dealing with behavior in response to a criminal offense. As such, it may involve a range of content, both in principle and in actuality (Gal & Dancig-Rosenberg, 2013). The present investigation presents RJ as a tool that can be added to the punishment toolbox, and can help to achieve the practical goals of retributive justice along with additional goals that retributive justice has difficulty in achieving, such as redressing the harm caused, providing the possibility of healing contact between offender and victim, offering the offender an opportunity to apologize and answer questions that are troubling the victim, as well as creating contact between the offender and the community. Thus, the two approaches should cover the criminal justice system jointly and individually.

It could be argued, even on the philosophical level, that retributive justice and RJ are not contradictory approaches. Both are based on the recognition that an offense undermines the balance between the parties, and that there has to be a proportionate response to the criminal act. However, the two approaches differ in how they believe the balance can be restored (Brunk, 2001; Zehr, 2002).

Zehr (2002) proposes viewing international justice as a continuum, with Western justice at one end, based on a retributive justice system, its strengths and weaknesses, and RJ at the other end, with its strengths and weaknesses. According to this view, there are clear cases that are located at each end of the continuum, while there are cases along the continuum in which both systems can be applied. This study reinforces Zehr's (2002) approach by offering the possibility of combining RJ procedures at the prison stage. At times, it will be appropriate to apply restorative practices as an alternative to imprisonment, and at others it will be appropriate to apply restorative processes in addition to imprisonment. Moreover, restorative practices, as examined in this study, can contribute to a variety of offenders, even those who have not yet accepted responsibility for their actions, and it is hoped that employing this process will ultimately help them to progress toward a process that includes direct meetings with the victims. Therefore, we believe that the findings reported here strengthen the approach according to which

restorative practices in conjunction with therapeutic programs that are implemented after the offender's conviction do not turn into retributive measures, but rather complement them. Moreover, a survey of the research literature, based on various studies that have been conducted as well as experience from the field, indicates that despite the tendency to limit RJ practices to less serious offenses, in actuality, in cases of serious harm, RJ may achieve significant results (Gustafson, 2005; Marsh & Wager, 2015; McNevin, 2010; Miller, 2011; Pall & Sten, 2011; Sherman & Strang, 2007; Umbreit & Armour, 2011; Umbreit et al., 2000, 2006).

However, we can understand the legitimate apprehension of employing RJ processes as an alternative to retributive processes, for example, prisons, in serious criminal cases. Thus, RJ should be viewed as an approach that includes a number of flexible models that can be adapted to the environment, the culture, and to the context of the offense – and which can exist in the changing interaction with the legal and court systems. There are many ways to conduct a restorative process during imprisonment, such as including a face-to-face meeting or using other ways to create interaction, like exchanging letters or videos. The present study found that use of alternative methods can have significant therapeutic effects. Furthermore, on a practical level, the study presents a simple, inexpensive, and safe alternative that can be implemented within prison walls. At times, it is practical rather than fundamental barriers that prevent establishment of rehabilitative and therapeutic programs in prisons, and, thus, the availability and simplicity of the program are of paramount importance.

Along with its contributions, the current study has several limitations, suggesting further research is warranted. First, the variables were examined using self-report questionnaires. This method may suffer from the possibility of disparities between the participants' statements about their emotional tendencies or behavior and their actual behavioral and emotional reactions (Holland et al., 2002). To overcome this limitation, the research procedure involved explaining to the participants several times that the questionnaires were anonymous, that the prison staff would not see them, and that they were requested not to provide any identifying details on the questionnaires. Nevertheless, the desire for social approval possibly influenced the participants' answers to a certain extent. An additional methodological limitation pertains to the relatively short time that elapsed between employing the restorative process and the responses to the questionnaires. Considering the multiple restrictions placed on the research team's presence within the prison walls, we were obliged to administer the questionnaires a short time after the participants' exposure to the restorative process. In a follow-up study, it would be interesting to examine the effects of the restorative process over time. However, we can assume that even if the effects of the process dissipate over time, it can be used as a "springboard" to

advance continued restorative work with offenders, which in certain circumstances can result in participants participating in more complex restorative processes.

In addition, the participants' demographic and cultural contexts should be mentioned. The study was conducted in two prisons in Israel; the majority of the participants were Muslim, and they defined themselves as religious or traditional. Thus, it would appear that the generalizability of the study's findings and conclusions to other populations with different cultural characteristics is limited. In future research, it would be of interest to examine prisoners with different demographic characteristics.

In conclusion, integrating restorative processes among those serving sentences in prisons could be important and significant for inmates in particular and for society in general. These processes could help inmates to become aware of the harm they caused and the needs of the victim and others significantly affected by the offense. In addition, as mentioned earlier, the prison's role does not end with the act of imprisonment. In other words, prisons could also engage with therapeutic rehabilitation to help inmates to better reintegrate into their communities after their release. The present study indicates that simple exposure to a victim's story raises the prisoners' awareness of the harm caused to the victim, and increases the prisoners' readiness to engage in restorative processes, thus reinforcing the rationale for establishing these processes among incarcerated during their prison term. The study shows empirically that offenders are willing to participate in restorative processes, and that these processes have a therapeutic effect on them in raising their awareness of the harm caused to the victim, accepting responsibility, and increasing readiness to redress the harm.

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### **Notes**

1. To comply with the request of the Israel Prison Service, and for reasons of privacy and confidentiality, the prisons are not identified by name.

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