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ANNOTATION

This study examined whether adding retributive components to restorative justice procedures would impact citizen’s perceptions of the acceptability of restorative justice procedures for handling crimes of differing severity.

DESIGN: STUDY I: Participants were 57 undergraduate psychology students who participated for course credit. Participants were educated on the differences between pure restorative practices and punitive procedures and were asked to judge nine court cases in terms of whether the cases should go through pure restorative procedures, a mixed procedure, or the traditional court process.

STUDY II: 43 undergraduate psychology students who were participating for course credit were randomly assigned to 1 of 2 conditions: (1) a no-fault conference outcome in which the victim and the offender from a mixed procedure had failed to reach an agreement, and (2) an offender-fault conference outcome in which a mixed procedure conference failed because of a lack of effort on the offender’s part. Participants were directed to answer questions related to the offender, such as likelihood of recidivism, and to offer their opinion of the sentence the offender should receive. Both studies were administered via Internet-linked computers. Data were analyzed using nominal logistic regression models and repeated measures ANOVA.

FINDINGS: The findings from study I indicated that participants were willing to assign pure restorative procedures for less serious crimes but they overwhelmingly included a retributive component for more serious crimes. Study II results indicated that participants did not lower prison sentences for offenders whose conferences failed, nor did they punish these offenders with more severe sentences. Participants consistently lowered prison sentences for offenders who successfully completed restorative procedures. The findings suggest that citizens may be willing to embrace restorative practices for less serious crimes but require more retributive options as the seriousness of the crime increases. The first study focused on whether the seriousness of the crime impacted citizen’s perceptions of the role of punitive measures in restorative justice procedures.