

# Victim-offender mediation

Repairing harm through facilitated meetings between offenders and victims.

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Effect scale	Quality of evidence				
	Effect Impact on crime	Mechanism How it works	Moderator Where it works	Implementation How to do it	Economic cost What it costs
 Overall reduction, some rises	 Strong	 Low	 Moderate	 Low	No information

## Focus of the intervention

Victim-offender mediation (VOM) involves a scheduled face-to-face meeting between victims of crime and the offender.

The meeting gives offenders and victims the chance to discuss the offence and the consequences, and decide what the offender should do to repair the harm caused by the crime. This includes an apology and may also involve financial reparations from the offender to the victim.

VOM may be voluntary or court-ordered. VOM can be used instead of a custodial sentence or at the end of a period of imprisonment.

While similar in content and aims, VOM differs slightly from restorative justice conferencing. This is because VOM focuses on bringing the victim and offender together, but not necessarily family and

community members who may have also been affected by the crime.

This narrative is based on two systematic review covering 15 studies each. Both reviews focus on juvenile offenders, using reoffending as the crime outcome.

- [See also our restorative justice evidence briefing](#)

## Effect – how effective is it?

Overall, the evidence suggests that VOM has reduced crime, but there is some evidence that it has increased crime.

The overall evidence is taken from Review one, which showed that those offenders who participated in VOM had a 34% lower rate of reoffending than those who did not participate.

After analysing the effect sizes by the quality of study methodology, Review one found that studies of greater methodological quality had significantly lower effect sizes than lower quality studies (27% reduction compared to 52% reduction).

Equally, those studies with longer follow-up periods had significantly lower effect sizes than those with shorter follow-up periods. Both of these findings are typical in criminological research.

Only one study showed an increase in crime but no details were given about this study.

## How strong is the evidence?

The Review was sufficiently systematic that many forms of bias that could influence the study conclusions can be ruled out.

The Review had a well-designed search strategy, and paid attention to various possible influences on the effect size by using appropriate statistical tests. It also took into account the potential effects of publication bias and differences between types of outcomes. However, it did not consider unanticipated outcomes or the effect of outliers.

## Mechanism – how does it work?

Both reviews suggest mechanisms by which VOM may help to reduce reoffending.

VOM is grounded in the principle of restorative justice, which emphasises crime as an act against an individual by the offender, and stresses the importance of the offender making reparation for that crime.

Review one noted that VOM offers a process by which those directly affected by the crime have the opportunity to be involved in responding to the offence. This includes:

- holding the offender accountable
- offering emotional and material assistance to the victim
- working towards developing a safe and caring community for both victim and offender

Review two noted the importance of emphasising personal accountability of the offender to the victim and the recognition of harm done by the offender to the victim.

VOM aims to resolve the conflict between victim and offender, and repair the harm to the victim emotionally and financially (where possible or desirable).

## **Moderators – in which contexts does it work best?**

Review one noted a number of potential moderators, including methodological quality and follow-up periods as discussed in the effect section.

No significant differences were found between effect sizes when analysing the type of offence (property crime or violent crime) or the sample of participants.

Review two conducted various moderator analyses, finding that three variables had statistically significant effects on the effect size.

- The differences between the control group and participant groups in terms of violent offenders – greater numbers of violent offenders had higher levels of reoffending.
- The definition of re-offence – studies which used re-arrest as their measure of reoffending had higher rates of failure compared to studies which used re-conviction as their measure of re-offending, because more juveniles may be charged with offences than are ultimately adjudicated guilty.

- Because not all studies had comparable control groups (some were more comparable than others), those treatment groups with the most comparable control groups also had the lowest rates of reoffending.

Review two compared VOM groups with matched controls and found the control group were almost twice as likely to reoffend after six months (0.54:1).

This effect decayed gradually over time and after 30 months the differences in likelihood of reoffending had reduced (0.87:1).

This echoes Review one's finding that longer follow-up periods show lower effect sizes.

## **Implementation – what can be said about implementing this initiative?**

Review one noted that premeditation – where both victim and offender consider what they want to achieve from the meeting and what restitution they would consider appropriate – is required in preparation for the meeting.

A guided face-to-face meeting is then arranged. This provides a safe space for genuine dialogue to take place and where emotional and information needs can be addressed.

VOM is typically used for property crimes and minor assaults, but some programmes have expanded to provide mediation for violent offenders.

Review two noted that while VOM most commonly involves juvenile offenders, it has in some cases been broadened to adult offenders.

In about 80% of cases the mediator (usually a trained volunteer) initially meets victim and offender separately in sessions that help prepare both of them for the subsequent dialogue.

The main meeting with both parties is designed to create an environment conducive to dialogue, in which to create a plan for the offender to repair the harm as much as possible.

## **Economic considerations – how much might it cost?**

The reviews do not mention the costs associated with the intervention. No cost-benefit analysis was conducted.

## General considerations

Due to the voluntary nature of participation in most VOM programmes, there is an inherent self-selection bias that makes interpretation of results difficult.

The addition of measures that assess the offender's motivation for participation may provide a means to control for differences in motivation and openness to mediation.

## Summary

Overall, the evidence suggests that VOM has reduced crime, but there is some evidence that it has increased crime.

Analysis shows that participants in VOM programmes have a 34% lower rate of reoffending than non-participants. Participating in VOM is voluntary, so this may produce a bias in the results as those offenders who do take part should be motivated to do so.

VOM is based on the principle of restorative justice, bringing together the victim and offender so that an apology can be made and a plan for restitution developed together.

Currently VOM is usually used for property crimes and minor violent offences.

The effect decreases over time with longer follow-up periods. It also appears to be less effective with violent offenders.

## Reviews

### Review one

#### Quality of evidence

Mechanism How it works	Moderator Where it works	Implementation How to do it	Economic cost What it costs
■□□□□ Low	■■□□□ Moderate	■□□□□ Low	No information

## Reference

- Bradshaw, W., Roseborough, D. and Umbreit, M. (2006) 'The Effect of Victim Offender Mediation on Juvenile Offender Recidivism: A Meta-Analysis', *Conflict Resolution Quarterly*, 24:1, 87-98

## Review two

Quality of evidence			
Mechanism How it works	Moderator Where it works	Implementation How to do it	Economic cost What it costs
■□□□□ Low	■■□□□ Moderate	■□□□□ Low	No information

## Reference

- Nugent, W., Williams, M. and Umbreit, M. (2004) 'Participation in Victim-Offender Mediation and the Prevalence of Subsequent Delinquent Behavior: A Meta-Analysis', *Research on Social Work Practice*, 14, 408-416

## Summary prepared by

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