



**RESTORATIVE JUSTICE-INFORMED CRIMINAL JUSTICE
SOCIAL WORK AND PROBATION SERVICES:
ADVANCING A PROCESS-BASED PSYCHOSOCIAL INTERVENTION STRATEGY**

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Abstract

Restorative justice (RJ) has been a groundbreaking movement in criminal justice social work and probation services, as it shifts focus from punishment to rehabilitation, responsibility, and reintegrative socialization. The current paper discusses the implementation of RJ principles in probationary intervention and proposes an organized, process-oriented psychointervention approach integrating cognitive-behavioral, self-determination, and trauma-informed models. By using psychological theories such as Cognitive-Behavioral Theory, Social Learning Theory, Self-Determination Theory, and Strain Theory, the study highlights the necessity of responding to offenders' cognitive distortions, emotional regulation deficit, and social disconnection in an effort to reduce recidivism and enhance long-term reintegration success. The intervention model proposed contains three significant phases: (1) Initial assessment and risk profiling, by employing psychometric measures and criminogenic need assessments to develop customized rehabilitation plans; (2) Individualized psychosocial intervention planning, involving cognitive restructuring, social support enhancement, and mental health interventions to address underlying criminogenic issues; and (3) Restorative justice in practice, through the implementation of victim-offender mediation, participation in community service, and monitoring of progress to maintain positive behavioral change. The research also considers the practical and ethical challenges of RJ in probation practice, namely concerns around power

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imbalance, coercion, and rehabilitation versus accountability. The research finds the need for empirically informed, structured interventions that move away from punitive models of surveillance to a more integrative, rehabilitative model of criminal justice social work. Future research should address the longitudinal consequences of RJ-informed interventions and system-level factors influencing probation success, so that rehabilitative processes are maintained as equitable, sustainable, and responsive to offender need.

Keywords: *restorative justice, criminal justice social work, probation services, offender rehabilitation, cognitive-behavioral intervention, trauma-informed care, self-determination theory, recidivism prevention, victim-offender mediation, psychosocial intervention.*

1. Introduction

Restorative justice (RJ) is a departure from the conventional criminal justice approach, with a contrasting response compared to punitive theories centered on punishment and deterrence (Zehr, 1990). Not based on punishing, RJ is a relational-reparative system aimed at reparation of injury caused by crime, emphasizing rehabilitation and reconciliation of offenders, victims, and communities (Braithwaite, 1989). By placing this work at the centre of accountability, victim healing, and offender reintegration, RJ provides a holistic response that captures the values of criminal justice social work and probation services.

At the probation service level, RJ values are practiced through guided interventions that reduce recidivism and enhance prosocial behavior (Smith, 2005). Probation officers and criminal justice social workers play a central role in this by facilitating restorative dialogue, facilitating victim-offender mediation, and applying evidence-based interventions to offenders' psychological and criminogenic needs (Burnett et al., 2013; Turliuc, Gavriluta & Parteni, 2012).

The role of probation as social work practice has, however, extensively evolved over time alongside shifts in penal policies and approaches. Rehabilitation-oriented and welfare-oriented concepts existed in the beginning, while risk assessment practices and goal-oriented interventions dominate today's probation service operations (Canton, 2024; Raynor & Vanstone, 2016). However, experts argue that probation should uphold its social work tradition, hence interventions continue to prioritize support, change of behavior, and reintroduction into society (Smith & Vanstone, 2002; Hardiker, 1977; Gavriluță, Țăruș, & Vulpe, 2013; Vișcu & Marici, 2025). There is a necessity of integrating restorative and therapeutic probation models highlighted in research that exceeds punitive forms of surveillance (Trinder, 2000; Fitzgibbon, 2008).

Restorative practice approaches employed by probation have been rigorously demonstrated. A meta-analysis conducted by Latimer et al. (2005) revealed that RJ programs are extremely effective in reducing reoffending, victim satisfaction, and long-term behavior change. Additionally, qualitative research reveals that offenders who attend RJ programs show greater self-awareness, empathy, and acceptance of responsibility than offenders who are offered traditional punishment-oriented interventions (Raynor & Vanstone, 1994; Sheldon, 1994). These findings support the need for formal, process-specific psychointervention strategies to be included in the provision of probation services in response to the offending's psychological, emotional, and social determinants.

Although restorative justice programs have been very successful in the rehabilitation and reintegration of offenders, there remains an immediate need for systematic, evidence-based psychointervention strategies that are embedded in behavioral, cognitive, and social components (Harper & Hardy, 2000). Process-based intervention policy ensures that processes of rehabilitation are systematic, individualized, and adaptable, targeting key psychological mechanisms underpinning offending behavior.

Psychologically, offending is often maintained by maladaptive cognitive schemas, inadequate self-regulation, and social isolation. These psychological constructs are well established in criminological and forensic psychology literature (Beck, 1976; Bandura, 1977; Agnew, 1992). Probation services and criminal justice social work must, therefore, integrate cognitive-behavioral, social learning, and motivation-based models to maximize the effectiveness of RJ interventions.

A number of psychological theories inform the development of formal restorative justice (RJ)-based interventions in probation services. Cognitive-Behavioral Theory (Beck, 1976) makes the assumption that offenders are likely to operate within distorted cognitive frameworks, on the basis of which they justify crime and exhibit lacking moral reasoning. Most offenders in the criminal justice system engage in automatic negative thought patterns, reinforcing their antisocial behavior. Cognitive restructuring treatments can help offenders to identify, challenge, and alter these negative cognitions, and thereby render them more self-regulating and responsible (McNeill, 2009). By altering cognitive distortions, probationers can be made more responsible for their actions and more able to make prosocial decisions.

Social learning theory (Bandura, 1977) emphasizes reinforcement and modeling as key factors in behavioral development. Offenders often grow up in criminogenic environments, where deviant behavior becomes normative through exposure to antisocial influences. Probation

interventions therefore need to provide alternative behavioral models, exposing the offender to prosocial role models and reinforcing adaptive decisions (Raynor & Vanstone, 2016). Through positive reinforcement, observational learning, and formal mentoring, offenders can gradually learn constructive social behaviors, reducing their reliance on criminal behaviors.

Self-determination theory (Deci & Ryan, 1985) provides an understanding of offender rehabilitation motivation that emphasizes autonomy, competence, and relatedness as determinants of long-term behavioral change. The argument is that offenders who are able to experience rehabilitation as a self-determined and autonomous process will be more likely to engage in meaningful, long-term behavioral change. RJ interventions should thus focus on intrinsic motivation, whereby probation programmes enhance ownership, self-efficacy, and social belonging (Smith, 2005). Encouraging voluntary, rather than coerced, rehabilitative activities among offenders enhances their commitment to change in addition to reducing the risk of recidivism.

Lastly, strain theory (Agnew, 1992) provides a sociological and psychological account of the etiology of criminal behaviour among individuals. This theory asserts that social and economic marginalization are more apt to lead to disempowerment, frustration, and criminal coping mechanisms. Individuals who experience economic deprivation, discrimination, or social exclusion will most likely employ crime as a means of meeting their unmet needs. In this case, RJ-focused interventions must go beyond behavioral change and address structural injustices, promoting economic empowerment, social inclusion, and access to resources that buffer against criminogenic pressures (Canton, 2024; Smith & Vanstone, 2002). Through the incorporation of education, work training, and social support networks into probation practice, practitioners can improve the systemic processes underlying reoffending and help offenders achieve sustainable reintegration.

They form the theoretical basis collectively for the development of planned, process-oriented RJ interventions in probation, with cognitive restructuring, social modeling, intrinsic motivation, and systemic empowerment being designated as key mechanisms for offender rehabilitation.

An increasing evidence base emphasizes that process-based interventions combining these theoretical approaches are more successful in both reducing recidivism and facilitating long-term desistance from offending than punitive or surveillance-oriented probation practices (McNeill, 2009; Trotter, 2000). RJ-oriented probation interventions must thus incorporate

initial psychological screening, individualized treatment planning, and long-term behavioral change monitoring (Burnett et al., 2013).

The general aim of this paper is to examine how the restorative justice principles can be effectively used in criminal justice social work and probation services by using a process-based psychointervention approach. The specific aim of this study is to examine the restorative justice (RJ) principles and their application within criminal justice social work and probation practice fields. By studying how RJ models operate in these environments, the project seeks to establish best practices in offender rehabilitation, victim restitution, and community re-entry. The project also integrates core psychological theories into RJ-based interventions, drawing on cognitive-behavioral, self-determination, and trauma-informed theory to maximize the effectiveness of probation services. A central objective is to develop a process-based model of psychointervention that explicitly applies evidence-based psychological interventions to offender rehabilitation, with the intervention specifically addressing cognitive distortions, emotional regulation problems, and social reintegration barriers. Furthermore, the study critically evaluates the ethical questions and policy demands of the provision of RJ-oriented probation services, covering issues such as power dynamics within victim-offender mediation, risks of coercion, and a balance between accountability and rehabilitative support. In addressing these dimensions, this research contributes to the ongoing development of a consistent, ethically grounded, and psychologically aware model of criminal justice and probation social work.

2. Theoretical foundations of restorative justice and psychosocial interventions

Restorative justice (RJ) is an innovative approach to replace old-style punitive justice founded on doctrines of retribution, healing, and reintegration (Zehr, 1990). Diverging from punitive justice paradigms emphasizing retribution, RJ seeks to heal the harm caused by crime through opportunities for communication among victims, offenders, and communities (Braithwaite, 1989). This restorative justice model provides an environment where offenders are made to take responsibility for what they have done while engaged in a process of personal change and reintegration into society. In criminal justice social work and probation practice, RJ has increasingly been embraced as a practice that not only responds to victims' needs but also reduces recidivism and offender rehabilitation (Kirkwood & Hamad, 2019).

Traditionally, criminal justice processes have emphasized punishment, deterrence, and incapacitation as the tools for crime control (Tyler, 2006). The models are premised on the

belief that fear of punishment prevents offending. Nevertheless, empirical evidence has consistently shown that punitive punishments alone have minimal long-term success in reducing rates of reoffending because they fail to address the psychosocial and behavioral roots of offending (Sherman & Strang, 2007).

Restorative justice, however, addresses rehabilitation and reconciliation, offender accountability as well as victim healing. In contrast to punitive exclusion of offenders from society, RJ-informed probation services emphasize more interaction, reintegrative planning, as well as prosocial skills establishment (Chui, 2002). RJ strategies are also cognizant of the reality that most offenders are members of the classes of socially marginalized individuals and, as such, intervention must target enhancing behaviour change rather than mere punitive restraint (McCulloch, 2005).

The psychological benefits of restorative justice (RJ) have been empirically documented and well established in studies that have validated RJ's effectiveness in rehabilitating, victim recovery, and offender accountability. The most important effect of RJ, perhaps, is that it reduces recidivism. Meta-analysis conducted by Latimer et al. (2005) found that offenders participating in restorative justice programs reoffended much less than offenders subject to standard punitive sanctions. This suggests that rehabilitative involvement, which leads to offender accountability and reintegrative socialization, is significant for long-term change in behavior.

In addition to its influence on offenders, RJ also raises victim satisfaction and psychological recovery. Unlike traditional systems of justice, which do not address victims' emotional needs in most instances, RJ lays great emphasis on victims' involvement in the process of justice so that they are able to express their experience, concerns, and expectations. Wenzel et al.'s (2008) research illustrates the way victims who participate in restorative justice discussions are more psychologically closed, emotionally recovered, and satisfied with justice than victims who experience traditional criminal processes. By making victims into agents of the justice process, RJ fosters empowerment and closure and avoids the chronic psychological anguish otherwise caused by victimization.

Second, RJ has been shown to enhance offenders' empathy and responsibility and activate their moral and cognitive development. Through reflective practice and organized conversation, RJ is able to effect moral reflection and internalization of prosocial values and, in the process, promotes offenders towards developing enhanced sensitivity to the consequences of their acts. Offenders who receive restorative conversations have been found to exhibit enhanced prosocial

identity reconstruction, which remains a critical factor in long-term desistance from crime, as suggested by Maruna (2001). By encouraging reflection, remorse, and accountability, RJ helps to enable psychosocial rehabilitation of the offender and thus assist in re-integration into society.

These results cumulatively indicate the revolutionary psychological effects of RJ, highlighting its potential to reduce recidivism, enable victim healing, and assist offender rehabilitation by a participatory and dialogue-based model of justice. With these psychological benefits, RJ is an effective intervention model for criminal justice social work and probation services, offering a rehabilitative and victim-centered model (Kirkwood & Hamad, 2019).

It is important to integrate psychological theories into the interventions of probation to be able to understand the mechanisms of criminal offending and derive evidence-based rehabilitation strategies. Through the implementation of evidence-based psychological models, it is possible for the probation services to establish formalized interventions that can decrease the offending cognitions, offending behaviors, and offending social environments. Theories provided below are a scientific foundation for RJ-informed probation services, thus making interventions therapeutic and rehabilitative.

Social Learning Theory posits that the acquisition of criminal behavior is based on observation, imitation, and reinforcement. The majority of criminals are raised in criminogenic environments where they are repeatedly exposed to antisocial forces, such as delinquent peer groups, family dysfunction, and neighborhood norms legitimating crime (Raynor & Vanstone, 2016; Turliuc et al., 2018; Turliuc & Marici, 2011). The effects of these variables culminate in the reinforcement of deviant behavior that causes crime to be a habitual response to social pressures, not to mention economic frustrations. If left unattended, offenders continue to model the behavior of their environment, reinforcing criminality and increasing the likelihood of recidivism.

In order to undo the effects of learned criminal behaviors, probation interventions must introduce alternative behavioral models that reinforce prosocial engagement and positive reinforcement. One of the most effective strategies is facilitating prosocial role modeling through mentorship programs and peer intervention groups, where offenders can observe and internalize adaptive social behaviors. In addition, probation officers play a crucial role in reinforcing positive behavioral choices by having structured supervision and ensuring the reinforcement of prosocial interactions on a regular basis (Bourgon & Gutierrez, 2012). These interventions allow the offenders to learn a new set of decision-making that reinforces positive

social behavior rather than delinquent behavior. Another underlying principle is challenging learned criminal attitudes by assisting in the development of adaptive social skills and moral reasoning (Annison et al., 2008). By reforming an offender's reinforcement contingencies, probation officers can effectively reshape their social environment over time, and thus enhance their prospects of desisting from crime and absorbing into a law-abiding society.

Cognitive-Behavioral Theory (CBT) emphasizes the function of distorted thought patterns in formulating criminal behavior, claiming that cognitive distortions play a part in antisocial decision-making. The majority of offenders rationalize their criminal acts by employing self-serving cognitive distortions, wherein they externalize blame, trivialize harm, and normalize criminal acts (McNeill, 2009). These distorted thought patterns create psychological obstacles that hinder offenders from recognizing the moral and legal consequences of their crimes. Moreover, research suggests that an overwhelming majority of offenders possess impulse control deficits and dysfunctional problem-solving skills, which also places them at high risk of recidivism.

CBT-based probation treatment aims to identify, challenge, and change these negative thought patterns through structured therapeutic interventions. One of the primary approaches employed is cognitive restructuring, which allows offenders to detect and amend distorted cognitive processes that underpin antisocial behavior (Bourgon & Gutierrez, 2012). Through learning how to dispute and replace irrational beliefs, offenders are in a position to develop more adaptive cognitive structures that support law-abiding decisions. Problem-solving and impulse-control training is yet another intervention method that operates through enhancing an offender's ability to self-manage emotions, delay gratification, and manage stressors independently of crime (Smith, 2005). Problem-solving and impulse-control training is particularly important for offenders with high impulsivity and poor emotional regulation since these traits have a strong impact on offense patterns and recidivism.

Additionally, psychoeducation in decision-making skills provides offenders with alternative means of dealing with frustration, interpersonal conflict, and social pressure (Tomita & Goian, 2009). Teaching offenders how to evaluate consequences, look ahead to dangers, and weigh prosocial alternatives has proven very effective in enabling long-term behavior change. The efficacy of CBT interventions in probation services is strongly evidenced, with the literature showing that structured cognitive-behavioral programs yield impressive recidivism reductions (McCulloch, 2005). By modifying dysfunctional cognitive styles and increasing self-regulation

abilities, CBT provides offenders with the psychological mechanisms to sustain behavior change and rejoin the community.

Self-Determination Theory (SDT) is one motivational framework with particular relevance to probation interventions, in its specification of the delivery of autonomy, competence, and social connectedness in pursuit of long-term change in behavior. Unlike punitive models of externally coerced and compliant change, interventions underpinned by SDT are premised upon internal motivation for offenders to invest in rehabilitation for reasons aligned with their own aspirations and sense of self-efficacy (Kirkwood & Hamad, 2019).

One of the key components of SDT-based probation programs is promoting offender autonomy. Offenders are more likely to engage in positive, long-term behavior change when they feel they have control over their rehabilitation process. By facilitating engagement in rehabilitation plan development, probation services can encourage internal motivation so that offenders will be more likely to comply with treatment programs, skills development programs, and restorative justice programs (Kirkwood & Hamad, 2019). This is unlike coercive mandates from others that lead to avoidance, superficial compliance, and future reoffending.

Another essential element of SDT-based interventions is the development of competence through employment readiness, vocational training, and personal development initiatives. Offenders tend to have few educational and career options, which expose them to reoffending due to economic insecurity and the lack of positive alternatives to crime. By enacting formal training programs, the services of probation are able to equip offenders with the necessary skills for becoming embraced in the workforce, improving their employability and return to society (Chui, 2002). Research has indicated that the attainment of a stable source of income significantly lowers the prospects of recidivism since it gives offenders purpose, structure, and financial security (Bourgon & Gutierrez, 2012).

Moreover, SDT-guided interventions emphasize the importance of social connectedness as a means of minimizing recidivism. Offenders are generally most likely to be isolated and have broken-down family or community relationships that foster alienation, anger, and antisocial attitudes (McNeill, 2009). Through prosocial bonding, probation services may aid offenders in building constructive social relationships that foster compliant behavior and positive emotional states. Offenders are aided by mentorship schemes, community outreach programs, and peer support groups that provide positive role models and sources of encouragement, which are critical to sustaining long-term behavioral change.

When offenders are subjected to self-determined motivation, they are much more likely to enact lasting change in behavior, diverting from a dependence on external punitive controls. Empirical research has indicated that when individuals perceive rehabilitation as self-directed and significant, they demonstrate increased levels of compliance, reduced recidivism, and improved psychological well-being (Bourgon & Gutierrez, 2012). Thus, SDT-guided probation interventions not only enhance offender agency and participation but also yield more successful and longer-term rehabilitation outcomes.

Strain theory provides a psychological and sociological account of criminality based on the view that people will resort to crime as a strategy to deal with structural disadvantage, economic deprivation, and social exclusion (Canton, 2024). Poverty, lack of opportunity for education, and social exclusion are averred to produce serious stressors forcing people to commit crimes of survival or flight psychologically. For probation practice, recognition of such extraneous pressures is essential in formulating interventions that address offending causes rather than punitive supervision alone.

To overcome the impact of structural disadvantage, probation interventions should focus on securing economic and educational opportunities for offenders. The majority of offenders under probation are part of low-income groups with limited access to stable employment or vocational training (Smith & Vanstone, 2002). Through the inclusion of job placement programs, trade certification, and continuing education programs, probation services are able to reduce economic burden, thereby eradicating economic incentives for crime. This has been supported by studies that indicate that offenders with steady employment are much less likely to recidivate because they have greater feelings of economic security and social belonging (Tomita & Goian, 2009).

Besides economic interventions, relief of social stressors that cause recidivism is another critical component of Strain Theory-informed probation practice. Offenders experience a number of life stressors including homelessness, unemployment, family disorganization, and social rejection (McCulloch, 2005). These stressors cause anxiety, frustration, and hopelessness, making offenders prone to recidivism. Probation interventions should therefore provide stable housing arrangements, crisis intervention, and mental health services with the aim of empowering offenders to manage social issues without crime. By reducing pressures from the environment, probation services can facilitate improved emotional stability and social reintegration, and in the long run, reduce rates of reoffending.

Further, strain theory also promotes probation departments to integrate social work values in practice so that the offenders are treated holistically rather than simply being monitored for compliance. Traditional models of probation usually focus on supervision and enforcement, but research indicates that rehabilitation-focused approaches—which address social and psychological risks—were much more effective in recidivism prevention (Buchanan & Millar, 1997). A social-work approach to probation would place greater emphasis on case management, counseling, and advocacy, with the probation officer adopting a change-facilitating role rather than being a mere enforcer of legally imposed conditions.

Evidence-based practice is in favour of arguing that probation services involving socio-economic empowerment programs are more successful in terms of preventing reoffending than those services emphasizing primarily punitive surveillance strategies (Tomita & Goian, 2009). Offenders receiving intensive rehabilitative services, including economic assistance, housing stability, skill development, and mental health services, have higher chances of being reintegrated into society, which leads to long-term crime desistance. Therefore, incorporating a Strain Theory-based model in probation interventions ensures that interventions address structural inequities as well as offender reintegration and well-being.

3. Criminal justice social work and probation: a process-based perspective

The application of restorative justice principles into the probation service transformed the role of the probation officer from punitive manager to rehabilitative practitioner who facilitates behavior change, responsibility, and resettlement. The criminal justice social work probation requires a process model based on individually assessed interventions, evidence-based case management, and therapeutic contact (Gregory, 2010). Given the complexity of offender rehabilitation, probation officers must employ multidisciplinary practices, including risk and needs assessments, trauma-informed care, motivational interviewing, and narrative therapy, to foster offender reintegration and desistance from crime.

Probation officers are at the forefront of offender rehabilitation through taking on a dual role: enforcing legal conditions and, concurrently, promoting psychosocial recovery. Unlike the more conventional punitive models that focus on compliance and surveillance, a restorative justice-informed model requires probation officers to take on the roles of case managers, therapeutic facilitators, and reintegration advocates (Knight & Ward, 2001).

One of the key functions of probation officers is to perform needs and risk assessments to decide the level of intervention an offender requires. Such evidence-based tools, including the

Level of Service/Case Management Inventory (LS/CMI) and the Ohio Risk Assessment System (ORAS), are used regularly to evaluate an offender's criminogenic risk, strengths, and rehabilitation needs (Bosker et al., 2013). These assessment tools allow probation officers to design specific intervention plans to address psychosocial deficits, emotional control problems, and reintegrative challenges. Nonetheless, there is evidence that probation officers have a tendency to underestimate the role of social capital and basic needs while being overly concerned with risk factors and less concerned with protective factors facilitating desistance (Bosker et al., 2013).

In addition to risk assessment, probation officers also organize victim-offender dialogue in the process of restorative justice. The systematic dialogues offer offenders a chance to admit the damage they have inflicted, apologize, and move towards restoring what was lost (Newman & Nutley, 2003). From a psychological standpoint, victim-offender mediation encourages moral contemplation, empathy, and responsibility, essential elements in changing antisocial thinking (Gregory, 2010). Research has indicated that participation in restorative justice programs enhances offender rehabilitation outcomes, particularly for low psychopathy and high prosocial individuals (Peters, 2011).

Probation officers must integrate trauma-informed practice in their practice in an effort to respond to the psychological distress typical of offender populations (Rad, Runcan, & Kiss, 2025; Maté, 2010). Probation offenders have histories of adverse childhood experiences, abuse, and neglect, which increase substantially their vulnerability to impulsivity, emotional dysregulation, and poor coping mechanisms (Herman, 1992). These early difficulties are the cause of higher rates of substance use, violent offense, and poor relationships, all putting individuals at higher risk for recidivism. A trauma response identifies that much offending delinquency and criminality is a product of prior victimization and traumatic experience, and thus probation work will be more effective with responsiveness to those hidden psychological issues than with reliance on punitive and compliance-only models.

Trauma-informed probation practice ensures interventions are designed in a manner to recognize the impact of trauma on cognitive processing, emotional regulation, and decision making. Offenders tend to have heightened reactivity to stress, frustration intolerance, and dysfunctional ability for future planning, with all these acting against rehabilitation efforts. Addressing these trauma-related deficits through the efforts of probation workers can reduce recidivism risk and ensure long-term behavioral stability (Runcan, 2021). Furthermore, minimizing re-traumatization is a core component of trauma-informed probation practice.

Traditional correctional interventions, rooted in coercive control and punitive management, can inevitably trigger previous patterns of trauma, leading to increased resistance, disengagement, and non-compliance with probation conditions. In contrast, using strengths-based, non-coercive treatments can create a sense of safety and empowerment, and allow offenders to become actively involved in their rehabilitation process.

Enhancing offender self-efficacy and resilience is an integral component of trauma-informed probation interventions. Individuals with long histories of trauma will experience lower self-esteem and feelings of reduced control over their own futures, potentially exacerbating cycles of offending and social exclusion. Probation work should therefore involve coping skills to build emotional regulation, stress management, and problem-solving skills and to equip offenders with the psychological assets for sustained change in behavior. Interventions that include therapeutic treatment, mindfulness, and emotional self-regulation training have been shown to improve psychological adjustment and decrease impulsive decision-making, the most powerful predictors of successful reintegration.

By integrating standardized assessment measures, victim-offender mediation, and trauma-informed intervention, probation officers can move beyond the typical surveillance-based model and use an integrative, rehabilitative practice in keeping with the ideals of restorative justice. In comparison to that of exclusively providing assurance that compliance is maintained and punitive practice is enforced, trauma-informed probation work is focused on holistic, individualized interventions addressing the causes of offending rather than the consequences. This shift towards probation that focuses on rehabilitation, as much as it helps offenders to desist from reoffending, results in greater public safety and a better ethical, research-informed practice of criminal justice social work.

The incorporation of evidence-based psychological interventions into probation services is vital to offender rehabilitation and recidivism reduction. A process-based intervention model ensures that therapeutic modalities are systematically integrated into probation services, targeting the cognitive, emotional, and social barriers that sustain offending. Some of the most useful psychological interventions in criminal justice social work are Motivational Interviewing, Trauma-Informed Care, Narrative Therapy, and Positive Psychology Interventions. Such interventions not only enhance behavioral change but also foster self-efficacy, accountability, and social reintegration through a restorative justice framework.

Motivational Interviewing (MI) is a directive client-centered counseling approach with the aim of enhancing a client's intrinsic motivation to alter behavior. Given the fact that the majority of

offenders are ambivalent towards rehabilitation, MI presents a structured framework to work with resistance, assess personal goals, and support self-efficacy (Miller & Rollnick, 1991). This approach is particularly effective in probation settings since it shifts the focus from outside control to internal motivation, ensuring that rehabilitation is a personal choice and not one of punitive obligation.

MI approaches encourage offenders to take responsibility for their rehabilitation journey, generating a sense of independence and self-governance. Through identification of inconsistencies between an offender's immediate behavior and long-term values, MI interventions strengthen motivation for change and promote sustained engagement in rehabilitation (Gregory, 2010). In addition, MI utilizes non-confrontational dialogue to explore resistance to change while maintaining that intervention approaches remain aligned with the offender's individual goals and aspirations (Gregory, 2010). Research has also demonstrated that MI-trained probation officers have higher success rates of working with high-risk offenders compared to officers applying authoritarian models of supervision (Peters, 2011).

Many criminal justice system participants carry trauma histories of exposure to physical abuse, sexual assault, family disorganization, and institutional victimization. Unaddressed trauma increases vulnerability to impulsive activity, alcohol and drug consumption, and violence, all crime and recidivism factors (Herman, 1992). Trauma-informed probation is a means of ensuring that treatment responds to the psychological impact of trauma while also being attuned to it, with interventions aimed at improving emotional regulation and resilience as the priorities. Trauma-informed probation practice recognizes that much antisocial behavior is the result of underlying traumatic experiences, as opposed to inborn criminality. The approach focuses on recognizing the effects of trauma on cognition and behavior and ensuring that probation officers do not respond to trauma-related behavior with punitive measures. Interventions are instead geared toward teaching emotion regulation skills that enable offenders to develop adaptive coping strategies to deal with stress, frustration, and interpersonal conflict. Creating a secure and nonjudgmental therapeutic environment is essential in minimizing the risk of re-traumatization, enabling offenders to engage actively in rehabilitation without experiencing psychological harm (Gregory, 2010).

The application of trauma-sensitive practices in probation services has been found to have improved rehabilitation results since they address the root causes of crime, and not its symptoms (Newman & Nutley, 2003). Therapy interventions that adopt trauma-informed therapy foster offender self-awareness, emotional regulation, and behavior modification over a

long-term period, successfully reducing recidivism and also reintegration of offenders into society.

Narrative Therapy is a psychosocial intervention model designed to reauthor an offender's sense of self. Offenders in the justice system tend to incorporate criminogenic self-concepts, which perpetuate self-reinforcing patterns of offending behavior (Peters, 2011). Narrative Therapy offers an open space where offenders can deconstruct offending selves and locate new, self-enhancing personal growth narratives.

Re-authoring of the individual narratives of offenders allows the dislodging of deeply ingrained negative self-assumptions, with the overall effect of transitioning away from a criminal self and towards a prosocial self. Through embracing a rehabilitative self-perception, offenders are able to learn control over and internalization of responsibility and agency, significantly boosting reintegration motivation. According to research, Narrative Therapy is said to have higher rates of emotional resilience, improved interpersonal relationships, and reoffending behavior (Gregory, 2010).

By incorporating Narrative Therapy into probation practice, offender reflection on past behavior is facilitated by practitioners, as well as positive self-change. Asking offenders to construct a future-oriented perspective fosters rehabilitation in the long term, reducing offending relapse and enhancing successful reintegration into society.

Positive Psychology values applied within probation work is a strengths-based approach that enhances the well-being, self-efficacy, and resilience of offenders (Seligman, 2002). Traditional deficit models of rehabilitation prefer to deal with criminal offending in general, while Positive Psychology interventions focus on personal growth, intrinsic motivation, and reinforcing positive behaviors.

One of the primary aims of Positive Psychology in probation is to highlight the strengths of an offender, building self-esteem and personal control. Contrary to defining individuals by their offending history, Positive Psychology aims to foster goal-directed and meaning-directed activities so that offenders are provided with a sense of purpose and direction. By strengthening psychological resilience, Positive Psychology interventions equip offenders with coping skills needed to deal with stress, adversity, and social adversity (Bosker et al., 2013).

Research has established that the use of strengths-based interventions among offenders manifests in higher levels of emotional stability, lower stress responses, and enhanced participation in rehabilitation programs. Strengths-based programs incorporating gratitude activities, strength identification, and futures thinking have been associated with higher

motivation for change and reduced disengagement from probation services. The use of Positive Psychology practices in probation ensures that rehabilitation is not merely the reduction of antisocial behavior, but also promoting general personal growth that enables long-term desistance from offending.

4. Process-based psychointervention strategy: a framework for implementation

A process-psychointervention model in probation services ensures that offender rehabilitation is structured, evidence-based, and targeted to the individual psychological, social, and criminogenic needs of each of the offenders on probation. Punitive surveillance models, on which the traditional methods have traditionally depended, have been subject to widespread criticism for their narrow recidivism-reducing impact (McNeill, 2009; Fitzgibbon, 2008). Instead, a treatment-informed intervention model, such as early risk assessment, individually planned psychosocial intervention plans, and restorative justice interventions, has been more effective in promoting behavioral change and social reintegration (Burnett et al., 2013). The following section offers a three-phase model that integrates risk assessment, cognitive restructuring, social support development, and restorative justice interventions to encourage desistance from crime and long-term rehabilitation.

4.1. Phase 1 - early assessment and risk profiling

The first phase of a process-based probation intervention is interested in comprehensive assessment and risk profiling in order to match interventions to the individual's criminogenic risk factors, psychological profile, and environmental stressors (Bosker et al., 2013). Effective probation interventions are reliant on accurate risk classification because generic, one-size-fits-all programs are less effective in reducing recidivism than those interventions that are framed around an offender's specific needs and strengths (Smith, 2005; Trinder, 2000).

One of the most widely used probation assessment tools is the Level of Service/Case Management Inventory (LS/CMI), which measures criminogenic risk factors, social functioning, and responsivity to treatment (Burnett et al., 2013). Similarly, the Ohio Risk Assessment System (ORAS) provides a methodical way of assessing dynamic and static risk factors, providing insight into behavioral patterns, cognitive distortions, and social circumstances likely to cause recidivism (Raynor & Vanstone, 2016). In addition to these standardized tests, psychometric inventories such as the Big Five Personality Traits Inventory and Aggression Inventories provide valuable information regarding impulsivity, emotional

dysregulation, and antisocial personality tendencies that can influence an offender's propensity for risk-taking behavior and response to rehabilitation (McCulloch, 2005).

Along with criminogenic risk assessment, an offender's strengths and protective factors must also be assessed, i.e., social support networks, coping skills, and prosocial engagement (Bosker et al., 2013). Empirical research has shown that overemphasis on risk factors to the exclusion of personal strengths leads to deficit-based interventions that cannot capitalize on an offender's internal motivation to change (Sheldon, 1994; Peters, 2011; Marici, 2015). A strengths-based approach, which identifies an offender's strengths and resilience factors, has been demonstrated to enhance compliance with probation programmes and the likelihood of long-term behaviour change (Harper & Hardy, 2000).

4.2. Phase 2 - individualized psychosocial intervention plan

Following risk assessment and psychological profiling, the second action is the development of an individualized psychosocial intervention plan, including cognitive, emotional, and social rehabilitation methods suitable to an offender's specific psychological profile and criminogenic needs. Evidence has consistently demonstrated that structured, evidence-based interventions for maladaptive cognition, social support deficits, and mental health disorders are significantly more effective than punishment alone in reducing recidivism (Trotter, 2000; McNeill, 2009; Vişcu & Marici, 2024).

Cognitive restructuring is one of the core components of an individualized intervention plan, an intervention grounded in Cognitive-Behavioral Theory (Beck, 1976) to detect and modify antisocial cognitive schemes. Most offenders exhibit cognitive distortions, such as blaming others, minimizing harm, and making excuses for crime, which contribute to their involvement in crime (Burnett et al., 2013). Cognitive restructuring interventions strive to overcome such dysfunctional thinking styles, promoting critical thinking, self-responsibility, and problem-solving skills (Raynor & Vanstone, 1994). Empirically based cognitive treatments, for instance, Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT), have been highly successful in reducing criminal behavior, particularly among high-impulsivity and emotion dysregulation offender groups (Smith & Vanstone, 2002).

Apart from cognitive restructuring, social support network construction is a crucial aspect of a specialized intervention strategy. Social isolation and inadequate connections to prosocial others have been identified as strong predictors of recidivism, highlighting the relevance of community participation programs that enhance social reintegration (Trinder, 2000; Canton,

2024). Probation services have to collaborate with community groups, employment initiatives, and rehabilitation services to provide offenders with formal means for prosocial engagement (Gregory, 2010).

In addition, mental health treatment for disorders and comorbidities is crucial as the majority of offenders suffer from concomitant psychological disorders such as PTSD, anxiety, depression, and drug abuse disorders (Herman, 1992; Bourgon & Gutierrez, 2012). Integrated mental health treatment, including trauma-informed treatment, substance abuse treatment, and psychiatric treatment, highly supports rehabilitation, avoiding psychological vulnerabilities from being a desistance barrier to crime (Fitzgibbon, 2008). The following recommendations are based on the best available evidence.

4.3. Phase 3 - restorative justice in action

The final phase of the process-oriented intervention model involves active engagement with restorative practice, emphasizing responsibility, victim restoration, and return to the community. Unlike punishment-based responses in the past that emphasized punishment and incapacitation, restorative practices for interventions are designed to address harm and advance offender responsibility (Zehr, 1990; Braithwaite, 1989).

A key component of this phase is victim-offender mediation, an official procedure that allows offenders to make reparation for the injuries they have caused, to meet with victims and offer restitution (Kirkwood & Hamad, 2019). Studies have revealed that victim-offender mediation schemes lead to greater victim satisfaction, greater offender empathy, and lower reoffending rates because they provide an avenue for actual accountability and self-reflection (Latimer et al., 2005; Wenzel et al., 2008).

In addition to victim-offender mediation, engagement of offenders in community service schemes provides the opportunity for restorative reintegration, with the offender contributing something positive towards society and learning about social responsibility (Maruna, 2001; McCulloch, 2005). Programs that entail organized community engagement, such as mentorship schemes, work-based reintegration projects, and restorative justice work schemes, have been shown to reduce offending significantly by providing a sense of purpose, belonging, and organized activity (Sherman & Strang, 2007).

Finally, measuring behavior gains through psychological assessment ensures effective interventions are adaptive and responsive to the ongoing needs of an offender. Continual cognitive-behavioral assessment, check-ins on progress, and mental health screenings allow

for probation officers to adjust intervention approaches, facilitating effective rehabilitation while addressing emerging risk factors (Newman & Nutley, 2003; Smith, 2005).

A process-oriented psychointervention offender rehabilitation approach in probation offers a format to facilitate rehabilitation structured, evidence-based, and inclusive and entails early assessment, individual basis cognitive-behavioral intervention, and restorative justice strategies. Using the instruments of risk assessment, cognitive restructuring intervention, mental health treatment, and victim-offender mediation programs allows probation agencies to reduce recidivism efficiently, generate behavioral change, and enhance reintegration into the community.

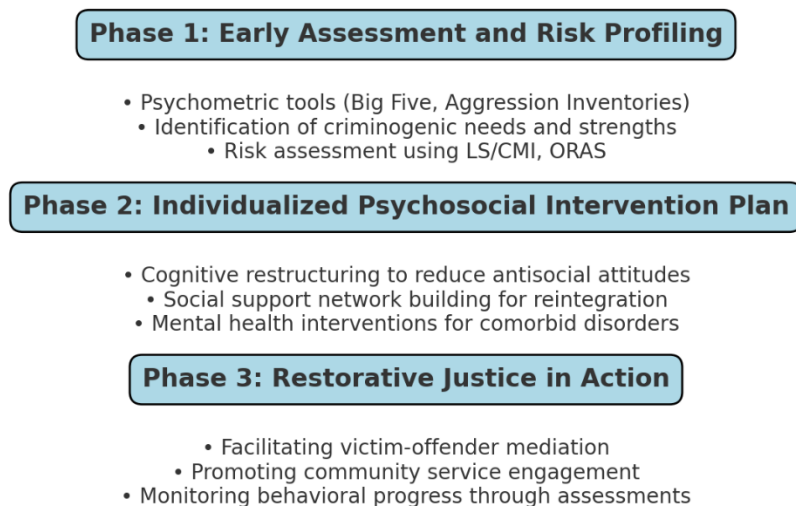


Figure 1. Three-phase process-based psychointervention model for probation services

Figure 1 visually displays the structured three-stage intervention model, outlining the key components of early risk profiling and assessment, needs-based psychosocial intervention planning, and restorative justice in action. All three stages include evidence-based psychological interventions for offender rehabilitation, behavior change, and social reintegration within probation settings.

5. Challenges and ethical considerations

The application of restorative justice (RJ) in probation work, although extremely effective, has several practical and ethical issues associated with it. Among the main issues is the concern of power dynamics and coercion threats within RJ programs. Crime victims, particularly those that participate in victim-offender mediation programs, may be coerced into participating in

reconciliation processes when they do not have genuine remorse. The possibility of coerced apologies and staged restitution questions the voluntariness of RJ processes (Kirkwood & Hamad, 2019). Victims are pressured by society or institutions to pardon offenders or speak with them as well, which discredits the authenticity and emotional safety of RJ programs (Wenzel et al., 2008). Making sure that all the stakeholders freely engage in RJ interventions without excessive influence continues to be a prime ethical concern (Latimer et al., 2005).

The last of the challenges with RJ-informed probation interventions is the effectiveness of psychologic interventions at reducing recidivism. While there is research that cognitive-behavioral treatment (CBT), motivational interviewing (MI), and trauma-informed care operate, these are contingent on offender engagement, readiness to change, and quality of implementation (Bourgon & Gutierrez, 2012; McNeill, 2009). Low motivation, resistance to change, and external environmental stressors (e.g., drug use, unemployment, housing instability) may limit the impact of psychological interventions (Smith, 2005). Probation officers also often work within resource-constrained environments, limiting their ability to provide routine, high-quality therapeutic interventions (Fitzgibbon, 2008). The measurement of long-term outcomes in behavior and treatment sustainability remains a research issue in probation (Burnett et al., 2013).

Balancing rehabilitation and accountability in probation services provides a further ethical dilemma. Traditional criminal justice frameworks focus on punishment and deterrence, whereas restorative justice and psychosocial interventions seek rehabilitation and reintegration (Canton, 2024). Probation officers must tread the thin line of keeping legal adherence and, while doing so, also ensuring the offenders' psychological and social well-being (Raynor & Vanstone, 2016). This balancing act is particularly difficult with high-risk offenders, where public safety concerns can conflict with rehabilitation needs (Trinder, 2000). Additionally, the potential for inequities in access to interventions raises ethical concerns, as some offenders—most significantly those from marginalized groups—may face unstable rehabilitative support due to system inequities (McCulloch, 2005). The challenges are tackled by constant policy developments, professional development of probation officers, and compliance with individualized, evidence-based treatment (Smith & Vanstone, 2002).

6. Conclusion and future directions

The use of restorative justice and psychological interventions in probation has transformed the traditional punitive models of supervision into rehabilitative models that center on

responsibility, behavior change, and reintegration. This paper has put the use of official risk assessments, personalized cognitive-behavioral interventions, trauma-informed care, and restorative justice practices in offender rehabilitation and recidivism reduction (McNeill, 2009; Burnett et al., 2013). By adopting a process-based psychointervention model, probation services can overcome surveillance-focused methods, ensuring interventions are individualized, evidence-driven, and attuned to the psychological and social needs of an offender (Bourgon & Gutierrez, 2012).

Policy-wise, several recommendations are put forward for improving criminal justice social work and probation services. To begin with, the wider application of evidence-based psychological treatments should be prioritized, in a way that probation programs are grounded in empirically supported therapeutic approaches such as cognitive restructuring, motivational interviewing, and strengths-based interventions (Harper & Hardy, 2000). Second, higher investment in probation officer training is necessary to equip professionals with the skills to engage in restorative dialogues, work with trauma-sensitive cases, and implement tailored intervention methods (Knight & Ward, 2001; Iovu & Runcan, 2012). Third, interagency cooperation needs to be fostered, connecting probation services with mental health professionals, community organizations, and employment programs to ensure offender reintegration and social stability (Chui, 2002). Finally, systemic reforms need to be implemented so that RJ interventions are morally accountable, non-coercive, and accessible to all offenders, particularly those belonging to marginalized and disadvantaged groups (Bosker et al., 2013).

Subsequent research must focus on RJ-based intervention effects in the long term, how restorative justice, psychological interventions, and offender reintegration influence recidivism and rehabilitation outcomes for the offender (Trinder, 2000; Smith, 2005). Subsequent research must study more intensively the role of probation intervention in the context of wider institutional forces, economic disadvantage, and racial discrimination in the case of recidivism (McCulloch, 2005). Pursuing the practice of restorative probation depends on a resolve to innovation, evidence-based practice that bridges the gap between justice, rehabilitation, and social reintegration. Through ongoing development of intervention methods, increasing trauma-informed and strengths-based practices, and addressing ethical nuances, probation services can lead the reform in transforming the criminal justice system for offenders and the general population.

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