



EUROPEAN
FORUM FOR
RESTORATIVE
JUSTICE

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RESTORATIVE JUSTICE AND VIOLENT EXTREMISM

Violent extremism refers to radical political, ideological or religious views which lead to the adoption of violent acts by an individual or group pursuing a certain cause or belief.

VIOLENT EXTREMISM

- Harm is often justified by a political ideology and strategy, and violence is an expression of anger due to perceived experiences of injustice, exclusion and oppression;
- Harm, victimization and trauma on individual, collective and social levels are the consequences of the violence;
- Emotional engagement and search for belonging and solidarity are among the motivations for joining an extremist group and engaging in acts of violence;
- The role of individuals change over the course of time, from victims to offenders;
- The objectification of victims, often chosen by chance, is difficult to understand and accept (how to respond to the usual question “Why me?”);
- The traditional criminal justice system intervenes with a highly punitive security response which often reinforces the sense of injustice that motivated the extremism in the first place;
- The failure to engage in societal and psychological responses, to respond to the underlying problems and to include and support all affected victimised groups sustains collective feelings of injustice and insecurity.

RESTORATIVE JUSTICE

Restorative justice is a balanced approach to justice, which aims at supporting both sides (victims, perpetrators) in the same way through a dialogue process. The focus of restorative justice is on the harm and injustices suffered, which go beyond the (criminal) offence and the need to find and punish the person responsible of such offence. Restorative justice practices, such as victim-offender mediation, conferencing and circles, are used in Europe and beyond to bring together people who experienced harm in society, in the justice system, in organisations, in schools, or in families. Research in restorative justice shows the great benefits that this approach has to individuals and society. Among others, victims’ needs of recognition and for understanding are more easily met due to the greater involvement in the justice process, and desistance from reoffending is better achieved.

EVIDENCE

Restorative justice approaches have also been used in the aftermath of long periods of violence, characterised by terrorist attacks, extreme ideologies and polarised societies (e.g. in Italy, the Basque Country, Northern Ireland). In addition to these initiatives facilitated by experienced restorative justice practitioners, some individuals organised themselves for meeting ‘the other’ (e.g. Israel/Palestine, Germany), showing the need of certain individuals to do justice through understanding and sharing, instead of separating and dividing. Such experiences can be relevant also to further understand the exit processes for (violent) extremists and to better support victims of

terrorism. All restorative justice initiatives known in this field are extremely different, if we consider the timing (start and length), the actual space hosting the encounters, the number of people involved, and especially the type of support received in secrecy of the initiatives, but they also have many common points, as shown in research.

RESTORATIVE JUSTICE AND VIOLENT EXTREMISM: KEY POINTS

- A key-principle in restorative justice is the voluntary participation: everyone has the right to abandon the programme at any time. Key-values such as honesty, respect and confidentiality, are crucial especially when intense conflict arose, for accepting disagreements and avoiding simplification of facts.
- Efforts are to be made to de-politicise the crimes and pay attention to the harm and suffering experienced by victims changing the focus from the historical to the human aspects of the story. The concept of truth is a crucial thread of the encounter (the difference between individual, collective and media truths and the expression of one's truth) to reconstruct new memories starting from the present and to re-appropriate a story that was taken away. Also, it is important to go beyond the general belief that suffering is an exclusivity for victims and looking at suffering as an element for reciprocity.
- The look at the future and desire for non-repetition, to end the circle of violence and give closure for future generations, is typical in the aftermath of long periods of violence. There is also a need to change the language from violence and polarisation to one which opens a space for dialogue.
- Restorative justice encounters are bottom-up initiatives, arising from the needs of individual people: some sought this encounter while others accepted the invitation. Common in many restorative justice encounters are the needs of visibility, recognition, empowerment, inclusion and social cohesion, as well as the needs to find answers (victims) and to give an apology or explanation (offenders). Each encounter is unique, so restorative justice cannot be standardised and simply replicated as a best practice and it cannot be foreseen for everyone even if it focuses on individual needs and expectations.
- The general aim of restorative justice is understanding, healing and closure and a commitment to invest in building relations and mutual trust. The preparation phase is extremely important, especially for assessing offenders who have distanced themselves from the armed group and rejected the ideology. The physical contact (i.e. shaking hands, sitting near each other) is necessary to break the wall between "the normal" and "the other" and to see each other as "human" (the victim who was targeted, the offender who is a monster).

RESTORATIVE JUSTICE

Restorative justice is an approach of addressing harm or the risk of harm through engaging all those affected in coming to a common understanding and agreement on how the harm or wrongdoing can be repaired and justice achieved. Its practices (such as mediation, circles, conferencing) have been offered and delivered to address harm in different conflict areas, such as justice, education, peacebuilding, families, organisations, and communities.

EFRJ

The European Forum for Restorative Justice (EFRJ) is the largest European professional network on restorative justice. We count more than 400 members, including 80 organisations, working on restorative justice practices, research and policy in Europe and beyond. Since our establishment in 2000, we offer support to implement and develop restorative justice through trainings, consultancy, research, advocacy, policy developments and events. Find our publications and more information on www.euforumrj.org.

Author: Emanuela Biffi,
European Forum for Restorative Justice,
Leuven, Belgium

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**EUROPEAN FORUM
FOR RESTORATIVE JUSTICE** VZW

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Hooverplein 10 3000 Leuven
0474 656 137 • RPR Leuven
www.euforumrj.org
info@euforumrj.org
Tel. +32 (0)16.373.598
Mob. +32 (0)466.20.91.12



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