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The Impact of Restorative Justice Programs on Preventing Child Victimization in Iranian and English Law

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In recent decades, the growing attention to children's rights and the necessity of protecting them against victimization have highlighted the need to reconsider traditional approaches to criminal justice. Restorative justice, as a modern and human-centered approach, seeks to remedy harm, restore social relationships, and rehabilitate individuals through the active participation of victims, offenders, and the community. This approach is particularly significant in cases involving child victims, who are characterized by heightened psychological and social vulnerability. The present study aims to examine the impact of restorative justice programs on the prevention of child victimization within the legal systems of Iran and England. The necessity of this research stems from the absence of comprehensive protective and rehabilitative approaches in traditional criminal justice systems, as well as the need to adapt successful experiences from other countries to the specific legal and social conditions of Iran. The research employs a descriptive-analytical and comparative methodology. Using library-based sources and examining legal documents and practical cases, the restorative justice systems of the two countries are analyzed. The findings indicate that restorative justice programs, including mediation, restorative circles, and family group conferences, can reduce the psychological and social harms experienced by children, enhance their sense of security, reduce recidivism rates, and increase family and community participation in the justice process by emphasizing the restoration of relationships, accountability, and reparation for harm. Furthermore, a comparative analysis of Iran and England demonstrates that the English legal system, through the application of modern restorative models, extensive professional training, and coherent support structures, has established more favorable conditions for the effective implementation of restorative justice in matters involving children. In contrast, the Iranian legal system continues to face challenges such as inadequate institutional coordination and a shortage of specialized infrastructure.

Keywords: *Restorative justice, child victimization, social prevention, Iran, England.*

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1. Introduction

In recent decades, attention to the rights and protection of children at risk, particularly child victims, has become one of the principal concerns of criminal justice systems. The experience of victimization, regardless of the type of offense, can have extensive psychological, social, and physical consequences for children, affecting not only their individual lives but also the social security of the wider community. In response to the inefficiencies and limitations of the traditional criminal justice system in protecting child victims, restorative justice has attracted attention as an

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innovative approach. Rather than focusing exclusively on punishment, this approach seeks, through the active participation of victims, offenders, families, and the community, to restore damaged relationships, repair harm, and enhance feelings of security and justice.

The traditional criminal justice system in Iran and many other countries has primarily been founded on the punishment and suppression of offenders. Nevertheless, particularly in cases involving children, this approach has failed to adequately address the specific needs and multidimensional harms experienced by child victims. As a vulnerable group, children require psychological, social, and legal protection to a greater extent than others; however, formal judicial proceedings often not only fail to contribute to their psychological recovery but may also impose secondary victimization by intensifying feelings of fear and isolation. In this context, restorative justice, by emphasizing dialogue, participation, and reparation, provides considerable potential for preventing repeated harm and strengthening the resilience of child victims. Despite the progress made in both Iran and England in implementing restorative justice, serious questions remain regarding its effectiveness, implementation challenges, and compatibility with the specific needs of children.

Clarifying the position of restorative justice in preventing the revictimization of children is necessary not only from scientific and theoretical perspectives but also from the standpoint of criminal and social policymaking. The absence of comprehensive comparative studies examining the performance of restorative justice systems in Iran and England and evaluating their strengths and weaknesses in addressing child victimization demonstrates the need for analytical and applied research. Moreover, given the adoption of new protective legislation in Iran and England's successful experiences in implementing mediation programs, restorative circles, and family-centered conferences, a comparative examination of these two legal systems can provide a scientific basis for reforming and more effectively applying restorative programs in Iran. The present study therefore seeks to answer the fundamental question of the extent to which restorative justice programs have been effective in preventing child victimization within the legal systems of Iran and England and what differences exist in their implementation and outcomes.

2. Theoretical Foundations

Restorative justice constitutes a philosophical framework that offers a different locus of thought and reflection concerning crime and criminal justice. Restorative justice represents a new way of thinking both about crime and about how society should respond to it. There is no consensus concerning the definition of restorative justice processes. Some definitions focus exclusively on the objectives and procedures of restorative justice: "Restorative processes and practices ... should strengthen offenders' and victims' sense of belonging 'to the community' and their satisfaction with restorative justice processes and practices" (Gholami, 2021).

This paradigmatic transformation in criminal justice discourse requires a transition from the traditional "state-centered" and "punishment-centered" approach toward a "community-centered" and "obligation-centered" approach. Within this transition, crime is no longer viewed merely as a violation of law and a breach of governmental commands; rather, it is understood as a rupture in human and social relationships, the restoration of which requires redefining the positions of the offender and victim within their surrounding social context. These processes and methods should enable victims to experience improved well-being as a result of participation in restorative justice processes and should hold offenders accountable in a constructive and meaningful manner by encouraging them to repair the harms and losses suffered by victims.

Howard Zehr, emphasizing the function of restorative justice, defines it as follows: "Restorative justice is a process that involves, to the extent possible, those who have a stake in a specific offense in collectively identifying and addressing harms, needs, and obligations in order to heal and put things as right as possible" (Gholami, 2021).

Zehr's emphasis on the three dimensions of "harm," "obligations," and "healing" reflects a shift in perspective from "punishment" toward "reparation." This approach defines justice not as a final product, such as the issuance of a judicial judgment, but as a dynamic process in which substantive justice is realized only through the active participation of stakeholders in identifying the reality of the harm caused and reaching agreement on appropriate methods of healing.

Restorative justice is a form of justice in criminal matters that is based on "reparation," meaning that its implementation should seek to repair, either fully or symbolically, the harmful consequences of crime and the losses arising from it. Marshall emphasizes that offenders should be given an opportunity to repair what has been damaged or destroyed as a result of the offense and should first take steps to compensate the victim, irrespective of why or how the offense occurred. He further argues that, in the administration of justice in criminal matters, the greatest emphasis should be placed on reparation by the offender. In this respect, apart from the payment of compensation, "reparation" may also include the offender's voluntary participation in counseling, treatment, or educational programs (Gholami, 2021).

In fact, from Marshall's perspective, the reparative nature of restorative justice extends beyond financial balancing or legal settlement. At a deeper level, the concept encompasses the restoration of the victim's human dignity and the return of moral agency to the offender, because active offender accountability becomes meaningful only when the offender, instead of passively "enduring punishment," assumes an active position of "repairing harm" and participating in rehabilitative processes.

Accordingly, repairing the losses of those harmed as a result of crime constitutes a fundamental concern of restorative justice. The general objective of all restorative justice processes is to improve and promote healing among all individuals involved, including the victim and even the offender. Regarding the broader objective, Zehr notes that the community and relevant groups within society also experience a sense of violation and intrusion as a result of crime and therefore require restoration. Because the public dimension of crime cannot be disregarded, criminal justice processes concerning many criminal incidents and matters cannot be entirely private or exclusively victim-centered. Crime jeopardizes the community's sense of security. For a community, "reparation" often requires certain forms of symbolic conduct, including elements such as denunciation of the criminal act, vindication of rights, restoration of confidence and trust within the community, and payment of compensation. Canadian scholar Susan Sharpe identifies five characteristics of restorative justice as follows:

According to the first characteristic, restorative justice represents an invitation to full participation, agreement, and consensus. This means that offenders, victims, and the local community participate in the administration of justice. In other words, under restorative justice, no single individual or institution, such as a judge or the criminal justice apparatus, possesses exclusive authority over the administration of justice.

The second characteristic is that restorative justice seeks to repair what has been violated. The central question in every restorative justice process is: "What does the victim need in order to recover and regain a sense of peace and security?" Offenders may also wish to take steps toward improving the situation. They may need an opportunity to repair and restore what was damaged or destroyed as a consequence of the offense (Zare, 2019).

The third characteristic involves an effort to create a sense of complete and direct accountability within restorative justice processes. Accountability does not merely mean that offenders must confront the incident that resulted in a violation of law, experience a sense of moral indebtedness, endure its consequences, be formally punished, or become subject to other governmental responses. Rather, their accountability may also be realized through alternative means, including repairing the harm inflicted upon the victim, the local community, and society.

The fourth characteristic involves efforts to restore unity and harmony to what has been disrupted as a result of crime. If it is assumed that all members of society are interconnected and maintain interpersonal relationships with one another, crime constitutes an act that disrupts such relationships. Restorative justice seeks to revitalize and renew those relationships.

The fifth characteristic emphasizes the objective of restorative justice to strengthen the community in order to prevent future crime. Crime causes harm and loss while also revealing pre-existing unjust conditions. Such circumstances may generate prolonged conflict between the offender and the victim, potentially contributing to further criminal behavior. These circumstances may result from structural economic, cultural, racial, political, or similar conditions. Restorative justice seeks ways to remedy existing criminogenic conditions and prevent crime (Rahami, 2006).

Sharpe's five-dimensional analysis clearly demonstrates how restorative justice develops from a simple model for

dispute resolution into a comprehensive framework for reconstructing social bonds. When these components are considered collectively, restorative justice can be understood as seeking to establish an order in which security is guaranteed not through fear of punishment but through the strength of interpersonal relationships and collective responsibility.

Acceptance of a restorative response to crime requires theoretical justification for the participation of all components of society, including the victim and even the offender. In this respect, Braithwaite emphasizes that as long as society fundamentally believes that "experts" can scientifically identify solutions to the problem of offending, citizens may refrain from participating in preventive programs and measures that they themselves could undertake. Under this conception, when an individual witnesses the commission of an offense or observes a neighbor violating the law, that individual may believe that they should simply continue with their own affairs because others, such as the police, are responsible for addressing the problem. Braithwaite proposes that crime is better controlled when community members assume a primary role by participating in the denunciation of offending and the creation of shame through coordinated cooperation, while simultaneously reintegrating the offender into society so that the individual can become a law-abiding citizen. Crime rates are lower in societies where people are not concerned solely with their own occupations and professions, where tolerance of deviance has clearly defined limits, and where communities seek to address their own problems of offending rather than delegating them exclusively to the police and professional authorities (Samiei & Naghdi Nejad, 2010).

This perspective confirms that monopolization of the administration of justice by professionals has contributed to "social alienation" from legal norms. By contrast, revitalizing the informal role of the community not only increases deterrent capacity but, through the creation of nuanced mechanisms of reintegrative shaming rather than stigmatizing shaming, also facilitates the offender's safe reintegration into the community and helps prevent renewed cycles of offending. In the absence of social participation, the role of law would be confined merely to punishment processes and would become largely meaningless unless social participation gives such a role an ethical dimension and assists competent authorities in addressing the problem of crime.

3. The Position of Restorative Justice in Addressing Child Victimization

In contemporary societies, protecting children's rights and seeking to repair harms inflicted upon them are matters of particular importance. Child victimization, as one of the major challenges confronting the criminal justice system, requires innovative and effective approaches that both protect child victims and contribute to improving their circumstances. In this context, restorative justice, as a complementary mechanism alongside traditional criminal justice, seeks to repair harm, restore social relationships, and strengthen a sense of responsibility among the parties involved in crime.

3.1. Principles and Objectives of Restorative Justice in Cases Involving Children

Unlike traditional criminal justice, which primarily focuses on punishment, suppression, and the imposition of sanctions upon offenders, restorative justice constitutes a more innovative and humane approach within the justice system and emphasizes the reconstruction of social relationships and the repair of crime-related harm rather than punishment. In essence, restorative justice seeks to involve all parties affected by crime, including the victim, offender, and community, in resolving the problems arising from the offense and thereby creating conditions in which the resulting harm can be minimized. Unlike conventional methods in traditional criminal justice systems, which primarily seek to determine punishment for offenders, this form of justice places particular emphasis on victims' needs and attempts to establish conditions in which victims can express their feelings and needs and move toward recovery.

In cases involving child victimization, the importance of restorative justice is even greater because children, due to their particular emotional and psychological characteristics, are more vulnerable, and the experience of victimization can have long-term effects on their lives. Accordingly, restorative justice seeks to create safe and supportive environments in which child victims can clearly express their feelings, fears, and needs. This process can not only reduce their sense of insecurity and

fear but also facilitate their recovery. Furthermore, particular attention is given to the role of families, educators, and counselors in supporting the child, with efforts directed toward ensuring that the child receives the necessary psychological, emotional, and social support. One of the fundamental principles of restorative justice in relation to child victimization is the active participation of all parties involved. This means that not only the victim but also the offender, the families of both parties, support institutions, and the local community play roles in resolving issues arising from the offense. Within this framework, instead of being subjected solely to punishment, the offender is encouraged to demonstrate greater accountability and develop a better understanding of the effects of their conduct on the victim. Restorative justice also gives particular attention to the concept of reparation. Such reparation may be material, psychological, or social, and its objective is to reduce the suffering and harm resulting from crime, particularly for children exposed to victimization (Khalilian, 2023).

Attention to the specific needs of children is of particular importance within this approach. Due to their young age, different levels of understanding, and greater dependence on adults, children require special forms of protection. Restorative justice therefore seeks to employ methods appropriate to the child's age and psychological circumstances in order to place the child on a path toward regaining peace and self-confidence. For example, restorative justice sessions may be designed in ways that make the child feel more comfortable, use symbols and visual tools to facilitate the expression of emotions, or involve professionals specializing in child psychology to accelerate the recovery process.

Another key objective of this approach is to reduce the psychological and social harm caused by crime to child victims. The experience of victimization may lead to problems such as anxiety, depression, feelings of guilt, or fear of interacting with others. Through emphasis on emotional expression, psychological support, and the provision of space for dialogue, restorative justice seeks to reduce these harms. Moreover, because this approach relies on interaction and dialogue, it can positively affect a child's sense of security and help rebuild trust in society. At the same time, restorative justice seeks to create opportunities for offenders to learn and modify their behavior. Under traditional criminal justice approaches, offenders are generally sentenced to imprisonment, fines, or reprimanding measures without necessarily developing a genuine understanding of the impact of their offenses. In restorative justice, however, offenders are encouraged to reform their behavior through direct interaction with victims and through understanding the consequences of their conduct. This process not only promotes greater offender accountability but can also prevent future offending. Accordingly, numerous studies have demonstrated that restorative justice can play an effective role in reducing recidivism (Zare, 2019).

Restorative justice constitutes a humane, comprehensive, and preventive approach to dealing with crime. By emphasizing participation, accountability, reparation, and attention to victims' needs, particularly those of children, it seeks to make the justice system more effective and equitable. This approach can reduce crime-related harms while also contributing to the development of a more empathetic and secure society.

3.2. Restorative Justice Processes for Child Victims

Restorative justice processes comprise a range of methods and measures designed to create balance among the offender, victim, and community. These processes seek to reduce the adverse effects of crime and contribute to repairing the harm inflicted upon affected individuals. In cases involving child victimization, the implementation of restorative justice assumes even greater importance because children, as a vulnerable group, require special protection. Such processes include methods such as mediation sessions, family conferences, and restorative circles, each of which pursues specific objectives for supporting victims and modifying offender behavior. One of the most important instruments of restorative justice is mediation, in which the victim, offender, and their families come together within a supportive environment. Such sessions are designed to facilitate discussion of the offense, its effects on the lives of those involved, and possible methods of reparation. Within this process, offenders have an opportunity to accept responsibility for their actions and directly encounter the victim. The victim, in turn, can express their feelings and may achieve a degree of psychological relief through this encounter. These sessions are generally conducted under the supervision of an impartial mediator responsible for guiding the

discussion and ensuring a safe environment (Moghaddasi & Habibzadeh, 2006).

At this stage, restorative justice moves beyond the level of a purely legal response and becomes a mechanism through which the victim's emotional and psychological needs are also addressed. Particularly in cases involving children, merely adjudicating the offense is insufficient to repair the harm suffered. A process must also be established that, as far as possible, restores feelings of security, trust, and emotional calm. Accordingly, restorative instruments in this field are designed from a supportive perspective to facilitate the gradual repair of crime-related harm and reduce the psychological pressures associated with it.

Family conferences constitute another restorative justice mechanism that emphasizes the role of parents and other family members in the recovery process and in facilitating the child victim's return to ordinary life. In such conferences, family members meet alongside professionals, counselors, and other individuals capable of providing support to discuss the child's problems and possible ways of assisting them. One objective is to ensure that the child feels that they are not alone and that their family is prepared to support them. These meetings also provide opportunities to educate families about appropriate methods of supporting the child and facilitating recovery. Restorative circles, another recognized restorative justice instrument, provide a setting for broader community participation in the restoration process. Such circles often include community members, officials, the families of the offender and victim, and sometimes offenders themselves. During these sessions, each participant can express experiences and perspectives, listen to others, and develop a better understanding of the impact of crime on the community. Such dialogue contributes to empathy, increased accountability, and mutual understanding and ultimately creates conditions conducive to reducing future criminal behavior (Beigi, 2021).

The significance of these mechanisms lies in their transformation of justice from a punitive and unilateral process into a framework for dialogue, participation, and the reconstruction of human relationships. Within such a framework, victims are not merely passive recipients of support; rather, they become active agents capable of expressing their harms and needs. Offenders, in turn, are placed in a position in which, rather than denying or distancing themselves from the consequences of their behavior, they confront its actual effects and demonstrate greater accountability.

Restorative justice processes not only contribute to repairing the harm suffered by victims but also alter offenders' perspectives and increase their sense of responsibility for their behavior. These methods further help prevent individuals from re-entering the cycle of crime and contribute to rebuilding social bonds. Particularly in relation to children, implementation of such processes can help prevent the destructive effects of crime on their development and future and guide their lives toward recovery and psychological well-being. Restorative justice is therefore a humane and participatory approach that, through emphasis on dialogue, empathy, and reparation, contributes to the development of a more stable and secure society.

4. The Effectiveness of Restorative Justice in Improving the Circumstances of Child Victims

The implementation of restorative justice in cases involving child victims has extensive effects on their psychological, social, and emotional well-being. Research indicates that this approach can reduce children's anxiety and fear, improve their family and social relationships, and increase their self-confidence. Furthermore, by providing offenders with opportunities to return to society without negative stigmatization, restorative justice reduces the likelihood of repeated offending. One of the most important advantages of this approach is the empowerment of child victims by encouraging them to express their feelings and actively participate in the justice process.

4.1. Restorative Justice Processes for Children in Iran

Restorative justice, as an innovative approach within the judicial and legal system, seeks to resolve legal and social issues through the principle of repairing harm and reconstructing damaged relationships. In Iran, this approach has acquired particular importance in relation to children, who are more vulnerable than many other social groups.

4.2. Stages of Implementing Restorative Justice for Children in Iran

The implementation of restorative justice for children in Iran requires particular attention to the characteristics and specific circumstances of this age group. Restorative justice, as a method for correcting conduct and repairing harm caused to individuals or society, must be implemented in cases involving children in a specialized manner that takes into account their psychological, social, and legal circumstances. Accordingly, the implementation process of restorative justice for children in Iran comprises several fundamental stages, each of which plays an important role in achieving the objectives of this approach. These stages are necessary not only for improving the child's circumstances but also for improving society and reducing the recurrence of offending behavior in the future.

4.2.1. Assessment and Identification of the Offense

The first stage in the restorative justice process for children is the assessment and identification of the offense or misconduct. At this stage, the child must undergo a comprehensive and thorough assessment. The assessment should take into account the child's psychological, social, and cultural characteristics so that the underlying reasons for the child's conduct can be identified and analyzed. Examination of the child's family, social, and environmental circumstances is highly important in determining the nature of the offense and the motivations underlying it. Because children are at different stages of development, their offending behavior may arise from psychological problems, family pressures, or adverse environmental influences. Accordingly, assessment should specifically include psychological examinations and social counseling to identify all factors influencing the child's behavior. Following a detailed assessment, it can be determined whether the child requires therapeutic, counseling, or rehabilitative assistance due to their particular circumstances or whether restorative programs can be designed for them. These assessments must be conducted carefully and sensitively in order to prevent future problems and ensure that justice is genuinely achieved (Zare, 2019).

Realization of this approach within the Iranian legal system requires a transition from traditional punishment-based models toward restoration-based models. This transition is not merely a change in judicial practice; rather, it requires the establishment of an implementation hierarchy in which each stage is aligned with the particular considerations associated with the child's developmental, cognitive, and emotional maturation. From this perspective, the restorative justice implementation process can be defined as an interconnected chain of specialized measures beginning with accurate identification of the roots of offending behavior and concluding with ongoing supervision of the child's social reintegration.

4.2.2. Consent of the Parties to the Restorative Process

At the next stage, obtaining the consent and agreement of the parties to the restorative process is critically important. The consent of the child, the child's family, and the victim or complainant must be obtained. Restorative justice processes for children must be designed with particular regard to both children's rights and the rights of the complainant. Due to their particular characteristics, children may not fully understand legal processes and restorative justice; therefore, they should be informed about the process using simple and understandable language, and their consent should be obtained. Participation must be voluntary, and the child should enter the process with full awareness of its different stages. The victim or complainant must likewise agree to participate in the restorative process so that justice can proceed appropriately. In this manner, both parties acquire a clear understanding from the outset of the obligations and benefits associated with the approach and can participate with greater confidence. At this stage, legal and psychological counseling for the parties is particularly important (Tajari, 2012).

Once the assessment stage has been completed, the child's psychological and social characteristics become the foundation for decision-making; however, identifying the causes of the offense alone is insufficient for implementing restorative justice. Transitioning from the "assessment" stage to the "implementation" stage requires observance of one of the most challenging yet essential principles of restorative justice: consensual and voluntary participation. Without confidence that the parties genuinely and knowingly wish to participate, the restorative process loses its participatory character and

becomes a compulsory procedure, thereby substantially reducing its rehabilitative effectiveness.

4.2.3. *Negotiations and Dialogue*

The next stage in the restorative justice process for children involves negotiations and dialogue. At this stage, meetings are held involving the child, victim, families, counselors, and legal professionals. The primary objective is to create a safe and supportive environment in which both parties can freely express their feelings, concerns, and perspectives. These negotiations provide the parties with an opportunity to listen to one another and develop a better understanding of how each has been affected. The meetings should be conducted under the supervision of skilled counselors and psychologists to minimize tension or psychological harm. Negotiations may take place in an informal and friendly environment to eliminate fear and anxiety and establish appropriate conditions for repairing damaged relationships. At this stage, all efforts should focus on promoting mutual understanding and empathy. Another important objective of these sessions is to reduce hostile and retaliatory feelings between the parties. The process can facilitate agreements and shared solutions for repairing harm and restoring relationships (Cheraghi Navid, 2016).

Once the parties' consent has been obtained, the principal challenge changes from "obtaining agreement" to "managing interaction." At this point, the process changes from a legal-administrative procedure into a communicative-psychological process. The quality of interaction between the child offender and the victim becomes decisive in determining the success or failure of the entire restorative program. It is therefore necessary to create conditions in which dialogue functions not merely as a means of reaching agreement but as an instrument for achieving a profound understanding of harm and enabling the child to directly experience accountability.

4.2.4. *Proposal and Acceptance of Restorative Measures*

Following negotiations and dialogue, restorative measures are proposed and accepted. These measures include programs designed to compensate for losses and repair damaged relationships. At this stage, restorative measures may include an apology by the child to the victim, financial compensation, or participation in social activities such as community service. Psychological and social educational programs may also be designed for the child so that the experience can become an opportunity for growth and learning. Restorative measures must be designed to assist both the child and the victim. For the child, these measures should include opportunities for rehabilitation, acquisition of social skills, and coping with life problems. They should also increase the child's awareness of social responsibilities and help prevent the recurrence of similar conduct in the future. For the victim, the measures should contribute to repairing psychological and social harm (Rahami, 2006).

The outcome of dialogue sessions and the agreements reached must be transformed into an operational and structured format referred to in legal literature as a restorative program or restorative measure. At this stage, the purpose of moving from dialogue to "action" is to transform abstract concepts of empathy and mutual understanding into tangible reparative behaviors. These measures should be designed to balance the victim's psychological need for reparation against the child's educational and rehabilitative needs. Accordingly, such measures should be selected carefully and through consultation in order to maximize their positive effects for both parties.

4.2.5. *Follow-Up and Supervision*

Following the implementation of restorative measures, supervision and follow-up are essential. Supervision involves evaluating the extent to which restorative measures have affected the child, the victim, and the community. This includes examining whether the child is learning and modifying their behavior and whether the victim experiences recovery and a sense that the harm has been repaired. Supervision should also address the broader effects of these measures on the community in order to determine whether they contribute to reducing future crime or offending behavior. If follow-up demonstrates a need to modify or revise restorative measures, such changes should be made to ensure that the process proceeds completely and effectively. The objective of follow-up and supervision is to ensure that restorative justice operates consistently with its objectives and contributes to improving the circumstances of both the individual and society.

4.3. The Role of Legal and Social Institutions in Implementation Processes

Legal and social institutions perform a highly significant role in implementing restorative justice processes for children. Acting as guides and sources of support, these institutions facilitate the implementation of restorative justice and contribute to the realization of its objectives.

4.3.1. Judicial Institutions

Judicial institutions play a fundamental and vital role in directing, supervising, and facilitating restorative processes for children, particularly in Iran. Courts and judges, as principal components of this process, must possess comprehensive knowledge of existing legislation and regulations, particularly those specifically enacted in relation to children and adolescents. Such knowledge is highly important because an accurate and complete understanding of children's and adolescents' rights and appropriate methods of dealing with them under specific circumstances enables judges to make effective decisions. In this respect, courts can employ alternative and innovative methods such as restorative courts. Instead of imposing severe punishments, such courts seek to guide child or adolescent offenders toward reconstruction and reparation of social harm. In restorative justice processes, judges must additionally supervise agreements reached between the parties, such as between the victim and offender, and continuously ensure that restorative measures are being properly implemented in accordance with the parties' needs. Supervision of therapeutic and rehabilitation processes also falls within judges' responsibilities in this context. To protect children's rights, judges must maintain positive interaction with other social institutions and organizations so that restorative justice processes can proceed effectively and carefully (Zare, 2019).

Nevertheless, judicial intervention alone cannot guarantee the effectiveness of restorative justice. Although judicial institutions function as directors and supervisors of the process, the realization of deeper restorative objectives requires specialized and operational support at different levels of society. This is where governmental and nongovernmental organizations become prominent as operational and supportive arms of the process. The connection between "judicial authority" and "support services" creates a framework in which, after encountering the law, the child offender is provided an opportunity to reconstruct identity and repair harm within a social environment under the supervision of care institutions.

4.3.2. Governmental and Nongovernmental Organizations

Governmental and nongovernmental organizations, particularly those concerned with children and adolescents, perform an essential role in restorative justice processes. Through psychological, educational, and supportive services for children and their families, these institutions substantially contribute to achieving restorative justice objectives. One of the most important roles such organizations can perform is the provision of counseling and therapeutic services required for reconstructing the personality and behavior of child offenders. The Welfare Organization constitutes one of the principal governmental institutions in this field and, through supportive and rehabilitation programs, plays an effective role in assisting children and their families. These organizations can also facilitate communication among children, victims, and the community. Nongovernmental organizations can further contribute to reducing offending and increasing public awareness by implementing educational and preventive programs at the community level. Through campaigns and educational workshops, these organizations can inform children, families, and communities about the importance of restorative justice and methods of participation. Particularly in communities with limited educational and informational resources, such measures can play a vital role in preventing crime and strengthening social relationships (Khalilian, 2023).

Alongside the institutional and structural support provided by organizations, one fundamental challenge remains: "How can the deepest psychological dimensions of the child be prepared for accepting responsibility and changing behavior?" Although supportive and educational services provided by organizations are necessary, without specialized intervention in the field of mental health, they may result only in superficial modifications. At this point, counselors and psychologists, as professionals specializing in children, emerge as a complementary component of restorative justice. Their expertise

transforms the process from a "social intervention" into a "psychological transformation."

4.3.3. *Counselors and Psychologists*

Counselors and psychologists specializing in children and adolescents function as key professionals in restorative justice processes. Through their knowledge and experience in analyzing children's behavior and psychological circumstances, they can play a fundamental role in assessing the child's psychological condition and identifying therapeutic needs. Such assessments may include identifying problems such as depression, anxiety, stress, and other psychological disorders that may influence the child's behavior. By employing therapeutic methods tailored to the child's needs, counselors and psychologists can participate in the child's restorative process. Moreover, they can assist during dialogue and negotiation sessions between the child and the victim and even in reconstructing the child's social relationships with the community. By providing an appropriate setting for dialogue and emotional expression, these professionals indirectly improve relationships between the parties. Counselors and psychologists can also provide education to the child, family, and even the community concerning methods of preventing offending and promoting mental health. Such services are particularly important for children exposed to psychological or social harm. Overall, counselors and psychologists, as a bridge connecting the child, victim, and community, exert a significant influence on the realization of restorative justice processes (Najafi Chaleshtari, 2022).

Alongside institutional and structural support, a fundamental challenge nevertheless remains: "How can the deepest psychological layers of the child be prepared for accepting responsibility and changing behavior?" Although organizational support and education are necessary, without specialized intervention in mental health, they may produce only superficial reforms. Counselors and psychologists specializing in children therefore constitute an essential component completing the restorative justice framework. Their expertise elevates the process from a "social intervention" to a "psychological transformation."

4.3.4. *Police and Enforcement Officers*

Police and enforcement officers perform important roles in restorative justice processes, particularly in cases involving children. In addition to fulfilling their operational duties relating to summoning children and transferring them to judicial authorities, these personnel must be familiar with different methods of implementing restorative justice. Specialized training for police officers and enforcement personnel can increase their knowledge of new legal procedures and effective methods of interacting with child offenders. Such awareness enables them to properly understand children's psychological and social circumstances and provide necessary support at various stages of the restorative process, including periods during which the child participates in educational or therapeutic programs. Police can also perform an important role in informing children and their families of their rights and responsibilities regarding restorative justice. For example, by informing children and families about participation in restorative sessions, the positive effects of such judicial processes, and the rights associated with them, police can make an effective contribution to increasing social awareness. As supervisors of restorative justice implementation, police and enforcement officers should also provide necessary legal and operational support for advancing the process where required (Samavati Pirouz, 2017).

Ultimately, restorative justice processes for children are not the product of a single institution but arise from coordinated action among judicial institutions, support organizations, mental health professionals, and enforcement personnel. Through specialized division of responsibilities and the establishment of a shared language of child protection, this interconnected network prevents the child's personality from deteriorating following involvement in crime and creates opportunities for responsible reintegration into society.

5. Practical Applications of Restorative Justice for Child Victims in Iran

Restorative justice, as an innovative legal approach, emphasizes repairing harm and restoring victims' circumstances to a desirable state. Accordingly, examining its practical applications for protecting child victims in Iran requires the establishment of support

structures, strengthened cooperation among relevant institutions, and particular attention to the rights and specific needs of this vulnerable group.

5.1. Establishing Support Structures for Child Victims

One of the most fundamental and essential steps toward successfully implementing restorative justice for child victims in Iran is the creation of support structures that not only protect children from the adverse effects of crime and traumatic incidents but also provide them with an opportunity to recover and return to a normal and healthy life. Such support structures must be designed and implemented comprehensively so that they can effectively address the diverse needs of these children. The first dimension of support for child victims concerns psychological and social protection. Many children affected by crime or traumatic incidents experience serious psychological and social harm. Such harm may manifest in anxiety disorders, depression, post-traumatic stress, behavioral and social problems, and even physical difficulties. Without appropriate treatment, these problems may have long-term adverse effects on the child's life and on society more broadly. Accordingly, creating and strengthening specialized psychological counseling and treatment centers for such children is essential. These centers should be designed not only to provide psychological services but also to address children's social support needs. Training and empowering psychologists and counselors are particularly important in this regard. These professionals must understand the specific characteristics of children affected by crime and trauma and be capable of employing empathetic and supportive approaches so that children's psychological treatment proceeds effectively. Such centers should also assist children in addressing social difficulties encountered following victimization. For example, children subjected to abuse may experience difficulties in social interactions, family relationships, or school environments that require psychological support (Gholami, 2021).

Nevertheless, the effectiveness of psychological and social services provided to child victims fundamentally depends on the stability and security of the environment in which the child lives. In other words, therapeutic and clinical interventions can contribute to reconstructing the child's psychological structure only when the child has been removed from crisis-generating environments and settings that reproduce violence. In the absence of a physically and psychologically secure environment, psychotherapy becomes merely a temporary and palliative intervention. Accordingly, moving from therapeutic services toward environmental stabilization constitutes an unavoidable requirement within the restorative support continuum and necessitates the design of safe temporary accommodation structures.

Another important aspect of support structures for child victims involves providing safe and protected environments. Child victims need to be placed in secure and stable environments so that they can begin the recovery process. Such environments should be designed to create feelings of safety and confidence and prevent renewed threats or risks. In this respect, establishing shelters and rehabilitation centers for child victims in Iran, particularly in areas with high levels of crime and violence, is necessary. Such centers should be operated in ways that provide not only physical safety but also address children's emotional and social needs. For example, children in these environments should be able to maintain direct or indirect contact with trained psychologists and counselors so that they can process psychological harm. These centers should also provide opportunities for children to interact with peers, thereby strengthening their social and communication skills. Supportive environments not only contribute to psychological treatment but can also effectively restore the child's damaged identity and facilitate renewed growth and development (Najafi Chaleshtari, 2022).

In addition to ensuring physical and psychological security in accommodation and rehabilitation environments, the child's genuine return to ordinary life requires addressing the material and economic difficulties that families frequently experience following crime. Physical security without economic security cannot remain sustainable in the long term, because extreme poverty and the inability to meet basic needs themselves constitute major risk factors that may contribute to revictimization or draw children toward secondary offending behavior. The integration of structural support with financial empowerment programs therefore constitutes a fundamental basis for overcoming the cycle of harm.

Alongside psychological and social measures, particular attention must be given to the financial and economic

needs of child victims and their families. Many such children encounter serious economic and social problems as a consequence of the crime or incident in which they were involved. Many are unable to secure basic necessities such as food, clothing, and education. These economic problems can directly affect children's capacity to recover and indirectly affect their psychological and social well-being. Providing financial resources for such children should therefore receive serious consideration in support policies. Such resources may take the form of direct financial assistance to the families of child victims, educational funding, health and treatment services, or employment support for parents. For example, where parents are unable to meet living expenses due to consequences arising from the offense or incident, appropriate financial and social support should be provided to secure the family's livelihood. Child victims should also benefit from educational and vocational support so that they can progress in education and future employment and escape cycles of poverty and social harm (Aghayari Kordkandi, 2024).

Accordingly, the government and relevant institutions should develop appropriate support programs that address not only children's immediate needs but also their long-term empowerment. Such programs may include creating employment opportunities for parents or providing free educational opportunities for children, thereby contributing to reducing the social and economic harms associated with crime. Support structures for child victims should be developed in an integrated and coordinated manner with other national social, legal, and economic policies. They should encompass every aspect of the child's life in order to protect the child from psychological, social, and economic harm and establish the conditions necessary for recovery. Psychological support, safe and protected environments, and attention to financial and economic needs therefore constitute principal components of the structures necessary for realizing restorative justice for child victims in Iran.

5.2. Cooperation Among Judicial, Social, and Educational Institutions

Successful implementation of restorative justice requires cooperation among judicial, social, and educational institutions. In any society, and particularly in a country such as Iran where different judicial and social systems are not yet fully engaged in resolving cases involving child victims, such cooperation can profoundly influence the recovery of affected children. Restorative justice generally refers to a process in which efforts are made to effectively restore the rights of victims by addressing the harm they have suffered while simultaneously supporting the reconstruction of social relationships and the restoration of the wider community. In this context, active cooperation among judicial bodies, social institutions, and educational organizations can effectively facilitate achievement of these objectives. Under current conditions in Iran, one fundamental challenge within the judicial system is that many cases concerning child victims are not effectively pursued at different stages of proceedings. Judicial institutions, frequently due to insufficient information or the absence of appropriate support mechanisms, particularly regarding issues involving children, are unable to accurately and comprehensively identify the needs of this vulnerable group. This situation may intensify social and psychological harm among affected children. Accordingly, the need for a comprehensive and coordinated approach involving effective cooperation between judicial and social institutions is increasingly apparent. Cooperation among these institutions can facilitate proper identification and referral of child-victim cases to supportive and therapeutic centers, particularly for psychological counseling, social assistance, and physical and psychological rehabilitation. Such cooperation can directly reduce children's psychological harm and help prevent their entry or re-entry into cycles of offending (Fereydouninia & Salehi, 2024).

Nevertheless, merely identifying and properly referring child victims is insufficient to achieve restorative justice objectives, because reconstructing their circumstances requires supportive interventions to be pursued within a coherent, continuous framework tailored to their actual needs. When cooperation between judicial and social institutions moves beyond isolated and fragmented measures, it becomes possible not only to remove the child from the cycle of harm but also to place the child on a path toward regaining psychological and social security. From this perspective, subsequent intervention should focus on instruments capable of organizing relationships among the victim, family, and justice system in a more humane and restorative manner.

Cooperation between judicial institutions and social organizations can also play a key role in formulating and implementing appropriate laws and regulations for protecting the rights of child victims. In many situations, judicial systems, particularly during crises, employ strict legal mechanisms to address offending. Yet punitive judicial responses and severe sanctions may have lasting negative psychological effects on child victims and can, in many situations, exacerbate psychological crises. Because restorative justice emphasizes rebuilding relationships and reducing social harm, judicial institutions must give particular attention to the circumstances of child victims during legal proceedings. Informal and more supportive methods, including mediation, restorative dialogue, and counseling sessions, can contribute to improving these children's circumstances. Rather than focusing on punishment, these methods emphasize restoring and reconstructing relationships between the child and the community and even between the child and the offender, thereby contributing to improved psychological and social well-being (Khalilian, 2023).

Educational institutions must also effectively perform their role within this process. Many child victims, particularly those exposed to violence or abuse, have discontinued their education due to traumatic experiences. Loss of educational opportunities can intensify these children's social problems and remove them from ordinary social participation. To prevent such harm, cooperation between the Ministry of Education and support institutions should be strengthened. Such cooperation may include returning child victims to schools, providing specialized educational services, and creating educational opportunities specifically focused on strengthening social skills and rebuilding self-confidence. Specialized education designed to help children restore psychological well-being and return to society is particularly important.

5.3. Attention to the Specific Rights and Needs of Children

Children, as one of society's most vulnerable and sensitive groups, possess particular rights that must receive careful and specific attention throughout all legal, protective, and social processes. Such rights are especially significant in relation to physical and psychological security, education, healthcare, and participation in decisions concerning their own lives. In Iran, one of the principal challenges in the field of children's rights concerns protective and implementing legislation, particularly in situations involving victimization and harm. Although legislation protecting child and adolescent victims has advanced, further attention and measures are still necessary to ensure more comprehensive protection of this group. One of the most important legal dimensions that should be addressed within protective and legal procedures, particularly restorative justice, is the child's right to active participation in restorative processes. Restorative justice generally seeks to establish an environment in which victims and offenders participate peacefully and in accordance with their circumstances and needs in repairing harm and resolving disputes without relying on severe punishment. For children, however, this concept must be applied with regard to age, psychological condition, and individual experiences. Restorative processes should therefore be designed so that children are not merely regarded as witnesses or victims but can participate actively and effectively in decision-making and restorative procedures. Such participation should correspond to the child's cognitive, emotional, and social capacities and should strengthen self-confidence and responsibility (Tajari, 2012).

Although recognition of the child's right to participate in restorative processes is important, genuine realization of this right requires circumstances in which the child can participate in decision-making without fear, pressure, or insecurity. Effective participation becomes meaningful only when the child's fundamental needs have been identified and supported because a child still struggling with the physical, psychological, or social consequences of victimization will be unable to play an active role in the restorative process. Restorative justice is therefore not limited to providing opportunities for children to express their views; rather, it also requires measures that rebuild their individual and social capacities. Under such circumstances, attention to the various dimensions of children's health and well-being becomes a fundamental element in the success of restorative programs.

Attention to the physical, psychological, and social needs of child victims must similarly remain a priority throughout every stage of restorative processes. Many children exposed to crime and victimization experience not only physical injuries but also multiple psychological

and social difficulties that may have long-term effects on their lives. These may include anxiety, depression, psychological and behavioral disorders, and difficulties with social and educational adjustment. For example, children exposed to violence may experience emotional harms such as loss of security and inability to trust others. Psychological counseling and treatment should therefore be provided professionally on both individual and group bases to assist children in overcoming the adverse consequences of such experiences and continuing their recovery. Many such children also require specialized education to successfully navigate socialization and adjustment to new environments such as school and the broader community. Educational programs should be designed with their specific circumstances in mind and should include social-skills education, problem-solving, and coping strategies for dealing with crises and psychological pressures. Educational services should additionally be integrated and coordinated with other support services, including healthcare, counseling, and social services, so that children's various needs are effectively addressed (Cheraghi Navid, 2016).

To fully realize children's rights within restorative justice systems, active cooperation with international organizations and use of international experience are highly important. Drawing upon the experiences of developed countries and successful restorative justice models can assist Iran in developing improved procedures for protecting child victims. These experiences include innovative methods of working with children, the establishment of effective legal frameworks, training specialized personnel, and employing psychological and social techniques in managing restorative processes. Cooperation with international organizations such as UNICEF and other human-rights institutions can provide scientific, financial, and professional resources and contribute to improving the legal circumstances of child victims in Iran. Such measures can lead to the establishment of an effective and comprehensive support system through which child victims are protected not only legally but also emotionally and socially from existing harms and threats. This can enable restorative processes to be implemented more effectively and in greater accordance with the needs of this sensitive social group and contribute to the rehabilitation and reconstruction of child victims' lives.

6. Practical Applications of Restorative Justice for Child Victims in England

Restorative justice, as an innovative approach within judicial systems, emphasizes reparation, restoring balance to damaged relationships, and empowering those affected by crime.

6.1. Innovative Restorative Justice Models in the English Judicial System

Contemporary restorative justice models within the English judicial system, which are predominantly based on rehabilitative principles, differ substantially from traditional punishment-centered approaches. Under these models, attention has shifted from punishment toward repairing and reconstructing the harm inflicted upon victims and the community. Rather than considering punishment as the sole solution, these processes address the psychological, emotional, and social harms experienced by the parties. Restorative justice, which began receiving more serious attention in England from the late 1990s onward, emphasizes interaction and dialogue between victims and offenders so that both parties can develop an understanding of the harm involved and obtain opportunities for apology and reparation. This approach assumes particular importance in relation to child victims because this age group possesses specific needs that may be neglected within other justice-oriented approaches. Children, for psychological and emotional reasons, need to experience support and security during restorative justice processes, and this requires the supervision and guidance of specialized mediators capable of managing the psychological complexities experienced by the parties (McCold, 2003).

The acceptance of restorative justice within the English judicial system cannot be understood merely as a formal change in methods of responding to crime; rather, it reflects a transformation in the theoretical foundations of criminal justice. Under this framework, victims are no longer regarded merely as peripheral elements within proceedings but are recognized as central participants in justice. This change in perspective is particularly important regarding child victims, who generally have less capacity to articulate harm, assert their rights, or

directly confront formal and demanding judicial mechanisms. Accordingly, any model intended to effectively protect this group must move beyond rigid and exclusively procedural frameworks toward supportive, dialogue-based, and flexible mechanisms. Restorative justice implementation structures in England are therefore designed to maintain a balance between offender accountability and the necessity of protecting the victim. This balance becomes particularly significant when the victim is a child, because the objective is not merely to establish the facts or impose criminal responsibility but also to ensure that children can participate without experiencing threat, shame, or psychological pressure. Specialized mediation programs consequently constitute one of the earliest and most important practical expressions of restorative justice within this system.

One common restorative justice model in England consists of mediation programs that allow the child victim and offender to communicate directly within a safe environment under the guidance of a specialized mediator. These programs seek to restore the damaged relationship between the parties while creating opportunities for apology and mutual understanding. Within this process, the child victim can share their experiences, while the offender may become aware of the consequences of the offense for the victim's life and thereby develop a stronger sense of responsibility. The psychological and physical safety of the child victim is particularly important in such programs, and mediators therefore play a crucial role in facilitating the process and preventing any renewed harm to the child. These programs are generally conducted in a variety of settings, including schools, community centers, and sometimes courts (Shapland & Atkinson, 2007).

Nevertheless, mediation represents only one manifestation of restorative justice, and the full effectiveness of this approach in supporting child victims becomes apparent only when it moves beyond individualized encounters between victim and offender. Practical experiences in England indicate that many harms arising from crime are not confined to the direct relationship between the two parties but affect broader networks of family, educational, and social relationships. From this perspective, genuine restoration occurs when both the victim-offender relationship and the social conditions that reproduce harm are addressed. Accordingly, restorative criminal policy in England has gradually moved toward models involving local communities, educational institutions, support groups, and broader participatory programs in restorative processes. This conceptual development demonstrates that restorative justice is not merely a dispute-resolution instrument or a mechanism for reducing post-offense tension; it also possesses broader potential for rebuilding social capital and strengthening collective responsibility. This understanding has created conditions for the emergence of models that increasingly emphasize social bonds, collective belonging, and the active reintegration of children and adolescents into their social environments.

In addition to mediation programs, other restorative models are implemented in England for child victims that focus more strongly on strengthening social relationships and individual and collective responsibility within the community. Such models are generally implemented through local and community-based programs whose primary objective is to strengthen young people's sense of belonging and social responsibility. Within these programs, child and adolescent victims may participate in community projects, voluntary activities, and group programs to assist their social reintegration. Such initiatives give children and adolescents opportunities not only to address harm but also to strengthen their social skills and become recognized as effective and constructive members of the community. Participation can promote feelings of personal value and empowerment while helping prevent repeated offending and strengthening social structures (Bazemore & Umbreit, 2001).

The importance of these community-based programs lies in their transformation of restoration from a limited judicial response into a continuing social process. Within this framework, child victims or adolescents affected by crime are not merely recipients of support but can gradually assume more active roles in reconstructing their social position. Such active participation is especially important during childhood and adolescence from educational and psychological perspectives because it can reduce feelings of rejection, stigmatization, and distrust of the social environment while strengthening belonging, confidence, and perceived usefulness. Evaluation of these models further demonstrates that the success of restorative justice in

England depends less on isolated interventions than on the quality of coordination between formal and informal institutions. The more coherent the cooperation among courts, schools, social services, families, and local organizations, the greater the likelihood of providing sustainable support to child victims and preventing secondary harm. The effectiveness of restorative models therefore lies not merely in the content of their programs but also in the way they are connected to supportive and social structures.

The implementation of restorative justice models in England demonstrates a humane and comprehensive approach to dealing with crime, particularly in cases involving child victims. These models not only contribute to repairing harm but also address processes of recovery and the individual and social development of both offenders and victims. Restorative justice in England can therefore function as an effective instrument for repairing social relationships and reducing crime, particularly among children and adolescents who are at sensitive developmental stages and require specialized forms of support (Van Ness & Strong, 2010).

6.2. Increasing Public Awareness and Teaching Restorative Skills

Restorative justice gives particular attention to increasing public awareness and teaching restorative skills within society, especially in relation to child victims. One principal objective of this approach is to transform social attitudes and behaviors in ways that improve social processes and reduce harm and offending. In England, various educational programs have been developed for parents, teachers, counselors, and other key individuals in children's lives so that they can properly understand restorative justice concepts and employ them in different situations (McCold, 2003). These programs emphasize humane and respectful ways of interacting with victims and offenders. For example, they assist parents in learning appropriate ways of responding to offending behavior or harm involving their children and avoiding nonconstructive forms of punishment. Participants are also taught how to effectively engage in restorative processes and use restorative concepts to improve interpersonal relationships.

The effectiveness of such public education, however, becomes apparent only when it moves beyond awareness-raising and penetrates the deeper layers of social and educational interaction. Restorative justice requires not only changes in macro-level policymaking but also behavioral transformation within everyday life. When parents or teachers, as intermediaries between children and judicial institutions, acquire restorative skills, they effectively communicate messages of peace and accountability to children that can facilitate recovery from trauma. In this context, incorporating restorative justice concepts into schools and community environments should be regarded not merely as a supplementary program but as a structural necessity for educating a responsible generation. By shifting emphasis from "educating caregivers" toward "directly empowering children and adolescents," restorative learning can become embedded within their behavioral and personality structures and form part of their broader socio-life skills.

Accordingly, special educational programs are implemented in schools and community centers for children and adolescents with the objective of strengthening problem-solving, interpersonal communication, and emotional skills. These skills can assist children in effectively coping with negative experiences, particularly harms arising from crime. Teaching social and emotional skills not only improves children's psychological condition following crime but also strengthens their ability to maintain social relationships, reduces conflict, and increases social responsibility among young people (Barton, 2015). Such programs also give particular attention to teaching children about differences in human emotions and responses under various circumstances, including situations involving crime or victimization, so that they can more effectively cope with difficult circumstances and social challenges.

The realization of such capacities at the individual level creates the foundation for a fundamental transformation in the quality of social relationships. As emphasized in crime-prevention theories, individuals who have learned anger management and peaceful conflict resolution through restorative education can use acquired capacities rather than coercive or violent methods when confronting future challenges. Such education therefore creates an inseparable connection between "children's mental health" and "public security." In this context, restorative justice extends beyond its role as a judicial

mechanism and emerges as a "cultural paradigm" under which every conflict is regarded not as an opportunity for confrontation but as a possibility for learning and strengthening networks of human relationships. Once this perspective becomes institutionalized within society, violence is no longer recognized as the first response to harm, and society moves toward a model of coexistence in which dialogue constitutes the principal basis of civic interaction.

At a broader level, these forms of education can contribute to reducing violence and social conflict. If children learn restorative and problem-solving skills from an early age, they can make better decisions in high-risk situations later in life and help prevent violence and crime. Restorative education can contribute to creating a safer social environment because individuals seek peaceful solutions to problems and disputes rather than punishment and violent confrontation. Such a development can not only reduce crime but also strengthen social solidarity (Bazemore & Umbreit, 2001). Indeed, by creating a society that is aware of and educated in restorative justice principles, greater social solidarity and stronger feelings of security and trust among community members can be expected. Teaching restorative skills to children and adolescents therefore contributes not only to rebuilding social relationships but also to preventing future social problems. Through comprehensive and extensive education, society can move toward a less violent future in which individuals not only protect themselves from harm and crime but also actively participate in improving their individual and social circumstances.

6.3. Providing Opportunities to Rebuild Social Relationships

A fundamental objective of restorative justice is to reconstruct social relationships and strengthen connections between child victims and other members of society. Particularly in countries such as England, this objective is pursued through multiple social and support programs designed for children affected by crime. The aim is not only to repair the social and psychological harm caused by crime but also to create opportunities for children to return to society as active and constructive members. Research indicates that social support and solidarity among community members, particularly following crime, can reduce adverse social and psychological effects on children (Bazemore & Umbreit, 2001). Under these models, restorative justice processes use activities such as interpersonal meetings, group counseling, and educational programs to engage child victims in different social environments, including schools and support groups, thereby preventing social isolation. In England, for example, various projects have been designed through which child victims can participate in social groups and even workplace environments (Shapland & Atkinson, 2007).

Nevertheless, reconstructing social relationships within restorative justice does not remain at the level of theoretical support or general intervention; rather, it requires concrete mechanisms for reintroducing child victims into collective life. Restoration acquires genuine effect when children are able, following victimization, to redefine themselves within social interaction and move from positions of passivity and vulnerability toward participation and agency. From this perspective, restorative justice programs in England can be considered successful when they not only reduce the psychological and social consequences of crime but also create opportunities for children to participate actively in social, cultural, and civic environments. Social participation should therefore be understood as one of the principal practical manifestations of restorative justice because it constitutes the link between restorative support and the child's social reintegration.

One effective restorative justice mechanism involves social participation programs that provide child victims with opportunities to engage in social, cultural, artistic, sporting, and voluntary projects. These programs not only provide opportunities to rebuild social relationships but also strengthen children's self-confidence and self-esteem. By establishing environments in which child victims can acquire positive social and personal experiences, such children can participate effectively in their own reconstruction. Through these programs, children can interact with other members of society and develop a stronger sense of social belonging, which can reduce feelings of isolation and social exclusion (Braithwaite, 2002). Such participation also enables child victims to use their latent capacities and recognize their personal abilities, thereby contributing to the development of new and stronger social networks (McCold, 2000).

Nevertheless, although social participation constitutes one of the most effective means of reintegrating child victims, it alone is insufficient to achieve restorative justice objectives. Children's participation in collective activities can lead to sustainable restoration only when such participation occurs within secure, supportive environments that do not reproduce harm. Children who have experienced victimization first require settings in which they experience psychological security, understanding, and acceptance before they can effectively participate in broader social environments. Accordingly, alongside participatory programs, the creation of supportive spaces is essential because such environments establish the conditions necessary for consolidating trust, rebuilding self-esteem, and preparing children for broader social relationships.

In addition to social participation programs, rebuilding the social relationships of child victims can be achieved through supportive environments. Such environments operate as safe and accepting settings in which child victims can interact with others who have had similar experiences. This provides children with opportunities to receive necessary emotional and psychological support and effectively address psychological difficulties. Research indicates that supportive environments can play a vital role in strengthening the morale and self-esteem of child victims (Latimer & Kleinknecht, 2000). Such environments additionally allow children to develop greater feelings of responsibility and solidarity with other members of society and strengthen their social relationships. This process not only contributes to healing children's psychological harm but also reduces the likelihood of future offending and strengthens their social participation (Zahnd et al., 2007).

Providing opportunities for the reconstruction of social relationships within restorative justice should be regarded as one of the most fundamental foundations for rehabilitating child victims because this process goes beyond merely compensating for harm and seeks to reposition the child within a network of human relationships, social support, and collective participation. England's experience demonstrates that integrating participatory programs, supportive environments, and educational and psychological interventions can effectively create the conditions necessary for children's social reintegration. The more restorative justice mechanisms focus on restoring children's sense of belonging, trust, and active participation in society, the greater the likelihood of achieving sustainable recovery from the harms associated with victimization. Reconstruction of social relationships should therefore be understood not as a secondary outcome but as one of the principal indicators of successful restorative justice in protecting child victims.

7. Conclusion

Restorative justice, as an innovative and humane approach within criminal justice systems, seeks to restore damaged social relationships, repair harm, and strengthen participation and accountability in responses to crime and has acquired a significant position within contemporary criminal policy. The importance of this approach becomes even greater when applied to vulnerable groups such as children, particularly children who have experienced victimization and, because of their physical, psychological, and social characteristics, are exposed to profound and sometimes irreversible harm. The comparative examination of Iran and England demonstrates that restorative justice can function in both legal systems as an effective instrument for the secondary and tertiary prevention of child victimization, provided that it is accompanied by appropriate support infrastructure, specialized procedures, and participation by relevant social, educational, and judicial institutions. In Iran, despite initial steps toward accepting this approach, the implementation of restorative justice for children continues to face challenges including shortages of specialized institutions, insufficient mediator training, and the absence of effective implementing regulations. By contrast, England has employed diverse and contextually adapted models, including restorative mediation, family conferences, and restorative circles, and has consequently developed a relatively effective framework for engagement with child victims.

One of the key achievements of restorative justice for children is their empowerment to express feelings and needs, reduction of anxiety and fear, reconstruction of social trust, and facilitation of their return to ordinary life. This not only reduces the psychological consequences of victimization but also, by creating a sense of security and enabling participation in justice processes, helps prevent repeated psychological harm

and even the development of secondary offending. Moreover, emphasis on reparation not only contributes to the relative satisfaction of child victims and their families but also increases offenders' understanding of the consequences of their conduct and helps prevent repeated offending. Research has demonstrated that, compared with traditional criminal procedures, restorative justice can reduce recidivism and, over the long term, reduce the social and economic costs borne by the criminal justice system. In light of the findings of this study, the following measures are recommended:

- Within the Iranian legal system, restorative justice should be incorporated as a formal and structured approach into legislation concerning the protection of children and adolescents, and specialized institutions should be established at the local level for its implementation.
- Specialized training in child-centered restorative justice should be expanded for counselors, mediators, judicial personnel, and police officers.
- Psychological, social, educational, and economic support structures should be established for child victims before their entry into restorative processes.
- Cooperation among governmental institutions, nongovernmental organizations, and international organizations should be strengthened in order to benefit from global experiences.

Authors' Contributions

Authors contributed equally to this article.

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In order to correct and improve the academic writing of our paper, we have used the language model ChatGPT.

Transparency Statement

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