Università degli Studi di Sassari
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XXXVIII ciclo

Changing the lens on justice: Assessing restorative attitude and the impact of restorative practices in schools

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Anno Accademico 2024/2025

Al mio Team, alla mia Maestra Patrizia e ad Ernesto,

alla mia famiglia,

a Paolo ed Olivia,

a me stessa.

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INTRODUCTION

In recent decades, restorative justice has progressively taken on a leading role in international debate in the legal, psychological and educational fields, establishing itself not only as a set of alternative practices to retributive justice, but also as a broad cultural and relational paradigm (Braithwaite, 2002; Johnstone & Van Ness, 2007; Zehr, 1990). Underlying this approach is the idea that crime or other offence is not merely a violation of a rule, but a relational harm that disrupts bonds between people and within the community. The response to the harm, therefore, cannot be limited to sanctions or punishment, but must aim to repair relationships, restore trust and mutual recognition (Van Ness et al., 2022; Zehr, 2002). From this perspective, justice is not an act imposed "on" someone, but a process built "with" the people involved, who share the responsibility of addressing and transforming the consequences of the offence. The roots of restorative justice lie in the community practices and traditional justice models of many indigenous cultures, which conceived of conflict not as a fault to be atoned for, but as a rift to be healed through dialogue, mediation and social recomposition (Daly, 2006; Zehr, 1990). Since the 1970s, these experiences have been taken up and systematised by social and legal movements that have promoted models of participatory, community-based and transformative justice (Braithwaite, 2002; Christie, 1977).

The restorative paradigm has therefore gained increasing institutional recognition at the international level. Documents such as the United Nations' Basic Principles on the Use of Restorative Justice Programmes in Criminal Matters (2002), the Council of Europe's Recommendation CM/Rec(2018)8, the recommendation CM/Rec(2023)2 of the Committee of Ministers to member States on rights, services and support for victims of crime and the European Union's Directive 2012/29/EU recognise restorative justice as an approach aimed at fostering dialogue between the parties, promoting responsibility and responding to the needs of all those involved in the harm. As Marder (2018; 2020) and Pali and Maglione (2021) observe, restorative justice has now become an established cultural and political reference point, capable of guiding public policies and institutional practices in various fields — from the criminal justice system to education, from community welfare to social policies. In the Italian context, the restorative paradigm has found fertile ground thanks to important theoretical contributions (Patrizi, 2024) and progressive regulatory recognition culminating in the Cartabia Reform (Legislative Decree 150/2022), which introduced the possibility of restorative pathways at every stage of the process into the code of criminal procedure. This innovation consolidates the prospect of justice based not on punishment but on shared responsibility and the rebuilding of bonds. In addition to representing an alternative legal

model, restorative justice is a relational and cultural perspective that radically redefines the very concept of justice. It shifts the focus from the violation of the norm to relational harm, from the offender to the relationship, from judgement to shared responsibility (Llewellyn & Howse, 1999; Zehr, 2015). As Wachtel (2016) points out, the shift from retributive justice to restorative justice implies a profound change in language and meaning: no longer “doing justice to someone”, but “doing justice with someone”.

The restorative paradigm is based on values such as respect, empathy, responsibility, participation and mutual recognition (Braithwaite, 2002; EFRJ, 2018). It is rooted in a positive anthropological vision that recognises people's ability to change, learn from their mistakes and actively contribute to rebuilding social bonds (Walgrave, 2008). From this point of view, restorative justice is not only a response to harm, but also a practice of prevention and community building, capable of strengthening the sense of belonging, trust and social cohesion (Morrison, 2007; Pranis, 2011). This perspective promotes a vision of justice as a process of transformation that involves not only the parties directly concerned, but also the community. The goal is not simply to restore a violated balance, but to rebuild relationships and meanings, creating the conditions for personal and collective change. In this sense, restorative justice is intertwined with concepts such as recognition, responsibility and dialogue, placing at its centre the idea that justice is first and foremost a human and relational experience.

The educational context is one of the most fertile grounds for experimenting with the principles of restorative justice. In schools, conflicts and relational difficulties are daily and inevitable experiences; however, when managed through a restorative approach, they can be transformed into opportunities for learning, personal growth and shared responsibility (Morrison, 2013; Riestenberg, 2012). Restorative practices in schools — such as restorative circles or peer mediation programmes — promote conflict management methods based on dialogue, active listening and shared responsibility. These experiences foster the creation of a relational climate based on trust, participation and inclusion, replacing the logic of punishment with that of care and reparation (Hopkins, 2002; Morrison, 2007). According to Mannozzi and Lodigiani (2025), schools are a privileged place for educating about justice and citizenship, as they allow values such as respect, empathy and responsibility to be experienced in practice. In this sense, restorative justice is not only a method of conflict management or a response to an injustice, but a true pedagogy of relationships and listening. At the international level, this perspective is now promoted by numerous organisations, such as the Council of Europe (2018) and the European Forum for Restorative Justice (2021),

which emphasise the importance of spreading a restorative culture in educational institutions.

Despite the theoretical and practical spread of the restorative paradigm, scientific literature has so far paid little attention to the psychological aspects that underpin it. Numerous studies have analysed the practices and outcomes of restorative justice, but few have investigated the individual dispositions—cognitive, emotional, and value-based—that make a genuinely restorative orientation possible (Kohen, 2009; Taylor & Bailey, 2022; Strelan et al., 2011).

The hypothesis underlying this research is that these dispositions can be traced back to a specific psychological construct called restorative attitude. Following the classic definition of attitude as "a learned predisposition to respond favourably or unfavourably to an object, person or situation" (Ajzen & Fishbein, 1970), restorative attitude can be understood as a stable tendency to interpret conflicts, harm or injustices in terms of responsibility, empathy, respect and the search for reparation, rather than blame and punishment. From a theoretical point of view, it lies at the intersection of social, moral and personality psychology. Individuals with a restorative attitude tend to recognise the complexity of human relationships, suspend judgement and seek responses that promote understanding and the rebuilding of bonds (Braithwaite, 2002; Zehr, 2002). The dimensions identified in the exploratory research conducted as part of this work — responsibility, respect, empathy, sense of justice, and open-mindedness — correspond to the founding values of restorative justice (EFRJ, 2021) and theories of relational morality (Llewellyn & Howse, 1999).

Starting from these theoretical premises, the aims of the research project were: a) to explore the psychological dimension of the restorative justice paradigm, through the definition and empirical validation of the restorative attitude construct and its measurement scale; b) to promote and experiment with a restorative justice education program in the school context, with educational and preventive purposes. For a clearer articulation of the contents, the thesis is divided into four chapters. The first chapter introduces the paradigm of restorative justice, reconstructing its theoretical and value-based roots and exploring its meaning in contrast to – but also in dialogue with – retributive justice. With reference to the leading authors in the field, the chapter explores the transition from a punitive to a relational view of justice, in which responsibility, recognition and participation become central dimensions. The second chapter analyses the main applications of restorative justice, with particular attention to educational and prison contexts. This section presents two systematic reviews of the international literature, providing an up-to-date overview of the practices, results and critical issues that have emerged in the various areas of implementation. The third

chapter addresses the issue of defining and measuring restorative attitudes, a concept that has been little explored in the scientific literature to date. It describes the process of constructing and validating a measurement scale, which is proposed as an empirical tool for assessing personal attitudes towards reparation, responsibility and respect for others. Finally, the fourth chapter presents the application of the theoretical model in schools through a training course on restorative justice education aimed at secondary school students. The quantitative and qualitative results show the positive impact of the programme on psychological well-being, sense of belonging to the school community and understanding of restorative values.

The conclusions summarise the main contributions of the research, highlighting the theoretical, methodological and practical implications of the work and outlining future perspective for study and intervention for the dissemination of a culture of shared responsibility and reparation.

The context of the research: Tempio Pausania Restorative City

Tempio Pausania is the first Italian restorative city, built on the model of the English restorative cities Hull and Leeds, and then which in turn became a point of reference for the construction of many other Italian and European restorative cities. The Tempio Pausania project "Tempio Pausania restorative city" was born in 2012 when the Prison «Paolo Pittalis» in Nuchis was converted into a high-security facility to host people convicted of organized crimes. The Tempio Pausania community was suffering because it fears mafia infiltration, the inmates were distant from their families and felt excluded from citizenship. Social conflict arose.

The University of Sassari, particularly the Restorative Justice Practices Team directed by Prof. Patrizia Patrizi, in agreement with the Nuchis Prison, the Supervisory Judiciary, the Municipality, and local NGOs, have started a process to build, starting from the prison itself, a new relationship between the institution and the community based on the values and principles of restorative justice. A process of raising awareness of the issues of peace, social justice, solidarity, inclusion and social cohesion as instruments of well-being for all parties involved. Restorative justice, in fact, has the potential to combine rehabilitation with social security through the involvement of citizens, in the form of a cultural shift that restores the community's ability to manage and resolve conflicts peacefully.

The main intervention tool was circles, meetings in which people gathered in a circle to identify resources and channels to spread the culture of relationships and the construction of peaceful approaches to dealing with harm and conflict. The goal was to encourage all those

present to reflect on the meaning and potential of a relational community. The circles, open to the entire community, allowed participants to rethink the ties between the local area and the prison for the sake of well-being: inmates, magistrates, lawyers, volunteers, journalists, educators, the third sector, administrators, law enforcement, teachers, students, and the entire community participated. Since 2016, students from secondary schools in Tempio Pausania and the University of Sassari have also taken part in the meetings.

In 2018, the Tempio Pausania District, one of Sardinia's regional plans that brings together nine municipalities to plan social interventions, approved the activation of a Psychological Counseling Restorative Service. This service, with a subsequent agreement signed with the Department of Humanities and Social Sciences of the University of Sassari, was entrusted to the Restorative Justice Practices Team. The Service promotes a pilot intervention to address social vulnerability, promoting social justice. For the continuation of the project, agreements are signed that lead the PLUS to finance the Service's activities with approximately 100,000 euros. The latest agreement finances the three-year period 2024-2026. Specifically, some secondary schools in Tempio Pausania are implementing awareness-raising programs for conflict management and building a school climate oriented towards restorative justice. This project «A school of restorative justice: apprentice facilitators» aims to train student facilitators to disseminate restorative practices among peers by promoting actions that educate about respect, legality, tolerance, non-discrimination, and constitutional values, and that increase the well-being of students and the entire school community. Regarding the actions carried out at the Nuchis Prison, in recent years, the composition of the group of inmates participating in the project has undergone several changes that have required specific work on the group to reconfirm the meaning of the meetings, including through the voice of those who have always been part of the group. Inmates who have already participated in the programs recognize the value of the initiative and embrace the principles of restorative justice, always encouraging new companions to participate in the meetings: it can be said that the group's composition has grown thanks to word-of-mouth from inmates and prison workers regarding the benefits of the project. One of the central themes for the group has concerned and still concerns the progressive detachment from mafia culture and criminal dynamics, as well as the maturation of a greater awareness of the harm done to their victims. Over the years, the number of inmates participating in restorative justice awareness programs has quadrupled: participants have encouraged more prisoners to participate in the various editions of the course, disseminating the teachings of restorative justice to fellow inmates, but also outside of detention facilities, to their families, and to members of the Tempio community. Currently, circles with prisoners

in prison are continuing, and regular meetings are planned between the prisoners themselves and students attending the restorative justice course at school.

The Tempio Pausania experience, therefore, represents a unique context in the national landscape: a territory that has successfully combined the penitentiary and community dimensions in a shared project of restorative justice. The presence of the Nuchis Prison and its central role in the city's transformation, along with schools, constitute a foundational element for understanding the genesis and evolution of restorative practices in the area.

From this perspective, the research project sought to outline the theoretical and applied framework of international restorative justice experiences aimed at prisoners and students, offering an interpretative framework useful for understanding the meaning and potential of the path started at the Nuchis Prison and at schools; on the other hand, it allowed us to highlight the principles, the patterns and outcomes of such practices. The choice to focus empirical experimentation on a single context —the school context— meets criteria of methodological convenience and sample accessibility but does not reduce the scope of the theoretical framework of reference. On the contrary, reflection on restorative practices in prison has helped consolidate the understanding of the restorative paradigm as an approach transversal to different social systems, capable of acting both in penal institutions and in educational and community contexts.

Therefore, the focus on prison represents an essential component of the research work, as it allows us to interpret the entire Tempio Pausania project as a restorative city as a continuum of experiences in which restorative justice becomes a shared culture, an educational practice, and a tool for social cohesion.

CHAPTER I. RESTORATIVE JUSTICE: CHANGING LENSES

1. Different definitions: what is restorative justice?

In recent years, there's been a lot of growth in restorative justice, which has become more popular socially, politically, and legally. It has been incorporated into the laws of various countries, including Italy, and has been recognised internationally (Aertsen et al., 2006; Marder, 2018; Miers & Aertsen, 2012). Restorative justice can be viewed in different ways: as a social movement, i.e. a cultural trend towards change; as an alternative approach to managing crime and conflict; as a set of values and principles (e.g. respect, listening, reparation); as a way of life or a philosophy (cfr. Zehr and the "10 ways to live restoratively"[1]); as a social theory of justice or a series of programmes that complement the traditional criminal justice system (Braithwaite, 2002; Richards, 2009; Sullivan & Tifft, 2001; Walgrave, 2008; Zehr, 1990). In practice, there is no single definition of restorative justice, and it is precisely this plurality that makes it so dynamic (Pali & Maglione, 2021; Pali & Pelikan, 2014). When studying restorative justice, one discovers that there is a rich (and often misleading) terminological panorama: we talk about popular justice, community justice, alternative dispute resolution, restorative practices, etc. Each term sheds light on a slightly different aspect of the phenomenon. Within each of these areas, there are contrasting trends: some seek to define boundaries (i.e., to say what restorative justice is and what it is not), while others want to bring different approaches together and encourage dialogue. This tension is part of the vitality of the field of restorative justice, but also of its complexity.

Social and community justice focuses on structural problems, such as systemic inequalities and injustices, and promotes forms of justice based on the active involvement of communities (Patrizi, 2024; Richards, 2009). As stated by Braithwaite, J. (2002), the restorative justice movement is the approach that has attempted to gather and systematise the practices and principles of restorative justice into a broader vision, as an alternative (and critical) to the punitive model. Restorative practices (as we will see later) refer to the concrete tools used in restorative justice, such as family group conferences, victim-offender dialogues (or better known as mediation) and restorative circles, which can also be used in non-criminal contexts, such as schools or institutions. Restorative justice can also provide for a more flexible and cross-cutting application of its values and principles in various areas, such as education, social work, personal relationships and conflict management (Patrizi, 2024).

[1] Howard Zehr shared his "10 ways to live restoratively" in an article published on 27 November 2009 on the Zehr Institute for Restorative Justice website. In this short but incisive contribution, Zehr proposes ten practical principles for applying the values of restorative justice in everyday life, not just in judicial contexts. https://zehr-institute.org/resources/10-ways-to-live-restoratively/.

At the same time, research has highlighted how, in certain sensitive areas such as sexual violence, victims often face significant barriers in accessing their rights, including compensation (Soleto Muñoz et al., 2024). Restorative justice in criminal cases, on the other hand, is the area most closely linked to the criminal justice system, where attempts are made to integrate restorative practices into criminal proceedings (Marder, 2020; Pali et al., 2024).

Although the restorative justice movement began in the 1970s, its cultural and philosophical inspirations are not uniform: in Anglo-Saxon countries (such as the United States, Canada, New Zealand and Australia), it developed through informal, community-based practices with a strong spiritual or religious component (e.g. Quaker or Maori influences). In continental Europe, on the other hand, there is a long tradition of formal, centralised state justice, which has made it more difficult to accept "bottom-up", more community-based approaches (Pali, 2018). Precisely because each context has "read" restorative justice in its own way, the need to find a shared definition has emerged. Bazemore and Walgrave (1999), together with Daly (2002), emphasise that a clear and explicit vision of restorative justice is needed to serve as a common reference point, both for theoretical reflection and practical experimentation, and to help establish what restorative justice is — and, as we will see in the end, what it is not. Cultural and historical tensions have made the field of restorative justice rich but fragmented, and the need for a shared definition arises precisely from this multi-centric scenario. his complexity also emerges in extreme contexts, such as terrorist victimisation, where restorative encounters have been tested with both victims and former perpetrators (Varona & Soleto Muñoz, 2014). Without this shared clarification, there is a risk that "restorative justice" will be used everywhere in a vague way, emptying it of meaning.

Marshall's (1996) definition describes restorative justice as "a process in which all parties involved in a particular crime come together to decide collectively how to deal with the consequences of the crime and its implications for the future" (p. 37). However, this definition risks restricting its scope to cases where a meeting is possible or appropriate. Furthermore, it does not explicitly mention the repair of harm, which should instead be at the heart of a restorative process. In this perspective, Bazemore and Walgrave (1999) argued that restorative justice should consist of "any intervention aimed at restoring justice by compensating for the harm caused by a crime" (p. 48). However, this definition also gives rise to a risk: that participation in restorative processes may be forced, or sanctions imposed if the meeting fails or does not lead to "satisfactory" reparation. This is contrary to the very values of restorative justice, which should always be based on the voluntary participation, respect and self-determination of those involved, and risks becoming just another tool of the

system rather than a transformative alternative. In this sense, McCold's (2000) statement is relevant: one cannot decide for others. Even when the state or the judicial system acts with good intentions, if they decide in place of individuals, then we depart from the genuinely restorative logic. In the words of Christie (1977), the state and/or the system and/or professionals (lawyers, judges, experts) become "professional thieves". Christie observes, in fact, that conflicts — which should belong to the people involved — are "stolen" by professionals. In this sense, legal professionals become "conflict thieves", appropriating something that should remain in the hands of the people to whom it belongs.

Restorative justice cannot be understood by reducing it solely to "outcomes" (i.e. concrete results) or solely to "process" (i.e. the way in which it is carried out), but through a more "holistic" view that brings together the various dimensions. Braithwaite (2000), in fact, points out that we often fall into a sort of "dichotomous debate": those who evaluate restorative justice solely based on results (e.g., whether the harm has been repaired) and those who focus solely on the method (whether it was participatory, voluntary, inclusive). Instead, according to the author, equal importance must be given to both: what matters is both what we achieve and how we get there. In this sense, Vanfraechem (2007) stated that restorative justice is "an option for doing justice that focuses primarily on repairing the harm caused by the crime" and that "it is best achieved through cooperative processes that include all interested parties" (p. 18). For the author, therefore, restorative justice is first and foremost a way of achieving justice that focuses on repairing the harm, but which is achieved through cooperative processes: this means that it is important to involve all parties (victim, offender, community) in a genuine dialogue.

Johnstone and Van Ness (2007), as will be seen in the following paragraphs, then argued that restorative justice must be viewed through different "lenses": the concept of encounter, which concerns the moment when the parties confront each other. This is the practical moment, the "how" of the process; the restorative concept, the basic idea that justice should aim to restore rather than merely punish; the transformative concept, which looks deeper. Not only repairing the harm but also changing the relationships and social structures that contributed to it.

The basic principles on the use of restorative justice programmes in criminal matters developed by the United Nations (UNODC, 2020; ECOSOC Resolution 2002/12[2]) define it as "any process in which the victim and the offender, and, where appropriate, any other individuals or community members affected by a crime, participate together actively in the

[2] https://www.un.org/en/ecosoc/docs/2002/resolution%202002-12.pdf

resolution of matters arising from the crime, generally with the help of a facilitator" (p. 3). The definition provided by Recommendation CM/Rec(2018)8 of the Committee of Ministers to member States concerning restorative justice in criminal matters[3] is very similar. The Recommendation affirms that restorative justice refers "to any process which enables those harmed by crime, and those responsible for that harm, if they freely consent, to participate actively in the resolution of matters arising from the offence, through the help of a trained and impartial third party (hereinafter the "facilitator"). The Recommendation is the first international document to adopt language that refers to people (those harmed by crime, and those responsible for that harm) rather than legal roles. Restorative justice often takes the form of a dialogue (whether direct or indirect) between the victim and the offender, and can also involve, where appropriate, other persons directly or indirectly affected by a crime. This may include supporters of victims and offenders, relevant professionals and members or representatives of affected communities". As Pali and Maglione (2021) observe, the way international policies discursively frame restorative justice has important consequences for how it is implemented and perceived in practice. In line with the definitions of the UN and the 2018 Recommendation is the definition contained in Directive No. 29/2012 of the European Union[4]: Restorative justice consists of "any process that allows the victim and the offender to participate actively, if they freely consent, in the resolution of issues arising from the crime, with the help of an impartial third party". As highlighted by Wright (2018), the European framework has in recent years played a key role in promoting the implementation of restorative justice, although with different levels of uptake and practice across Member States. Much more complex and detailed is the definition contained in Recommendation R(2010)1 of the Committee of Ministers to Member States on the Council of Europe rules on probation[5]. According to the Recommendation, restorative justice "includes approaches and programmes based on the following principles: a) the response to crime should, as far as possible, restore the victim to the state in which they would have been had the crime not been committed; b) offenders should be made to understand that their acts are unacceptable and have real consequences for the victim and society; c) offenders can and must take responsibility for their actions; d) victims must be given the opportunity to express their needs and be involved in discussions aimed at determining how the offender can best repair the harm caused; e) the community is required to contribute to this process. The difference

[3] https://www.coe.int/en/web/prison/home/-/asset_publisher/ky2olXXXogcx/content/recommendation-cm-rec-2018-8.
[4] Directive 2012/29/EU of the European Parliament and of the Council of 25 October 2012 establishing minimum standards on the rights, support and protection of victims of crime, and replacing Council Framework Decision 2001/220/JHA, partially implemented by Italy with Legislative Decree No. 212 of 15 December 2015.
[5] https://rm.coe.int/16800cc249.

in approach to the issue contained in the two types of definitions is clear. One refers to restorative justice that looks at the social bond, as altered by the criminal event, and brings out the different perceptions and experiences of the parties involved, to rebuild the bond itself, considering the diversity of experiences, motivations and needs that characterise the individuals involved, within the broader framework of social relations. This approach is therefore centred on the relationship, its restoration in the face of the negative effects of the crime and the community's involvement in this process. The other, on the other hand, refers to restorative justice that focuses primarily on the guilt and responsibility of the offender, an expression of a reocentric approach centred on the perception of guilt, the assumption of responsibility and the activation of restorative initiatives, at the request of the victim and with the participation of the community.

A broader and more inclusive view of restorative justice, shared internationally, which highlights the fundamental dimensions of the approach, emerges from the most recent definition provided by the European Forum for Restorative Justice (EFRJ; 2018), according to which restorative justice is "an approach to addressing harm or the risk of harm by engaging all those affected in coming to a common understanding and agreement on how the harm or wrongdoing can be repaired and justice achieved" (p. 3). According to this vision, which goes beyond the criminal justice system, restorative justice and restorative practices do not only affect criminal behaviour but also conflicts and transgressions that may occur in the community and in everyday contexts, and not only as a response to conflict, but as a preventive approach to caring for relationships. In this perspective, restorative justice represents an approach aimed at promoting lifestyles and capacities for peaceful conflict management oriented towards a social sense of justice in relationships and communities, trust, inclusion, cohesion, equity, peace and social support.

As can be seen, providing a single definition, or at least a precise and unified vision, of restorative justice is impossible and perhaps even counterproductive. Seeking a "perfect definition" of restorative justice is not the key to making it work well or to making it appear more legitimate or respected. In other words, theory does not change reality. Furthermore, setting overly rigid rules on what can be considered restorative justice risks stifling creativity and diversity of approaches. For restorative justice to have a real and positive effect, we must accept its complexity, promote experimentation and not limit ourselves to overly rigid definitions or frameworks. This is something that those working in the field are already noticing: restorative justice cannot be reduced to a standard model, because it arises precisely from flexibility, listening and adaptation to different contexts. Finally, the theoretical debate may not have much impact on the criminal justice system, which is itself very heterogeneous

and full of contradictions: different values, different practices, conflicting objectives. The reflection, therefore, may not be so much about what restorative justice is. Real justice systems tend to be pragmatic: they adopt what works, without worrying too much about adhering to a rigid definition where it is not necessary to impose a single vision of restorative justice, as each context can adapt useful elements. Theoretical definitions, implementation phases or general principles are often considered "unproductive" when it comes to really changing ways of thinking. However, they have nevertheless been useful in stimulating debate, helping those working in the field and influencing policy. The idea that restorative justice does not have a fixed form is not seen as a flaw, but as a strength (Pali & Maglione, 2021). It is precisely this complexity that makes it alive and capable of evolving (Johnstone & Van Ness, 2007).

Finally, to think in new ways, it is sometimes necessary to break with what is already established, even by refusing to take a clear position. Complexity cannot be overcome with new perspectives alone.

2. What does restorative justice deal with?

Restorative justice is a legal and social paradigm that reconsiders the way we deal with harm, conflict and responsibility, shifting the focus from the violation of abstract norms to the concrete harm caused to relationships between people (Zehr, 1990). It is primarily concerned with repairing the harm caused by a crime, but it does so through processes that seek to actively involve all stakeholders – victims, perpetrators and communities – in the search for a shared, meaningful and transformative response (Braithwaite, 2002; Vanfraechem, 2007). It cannot be interpreted as a procedural model or a single type of intervention: restorative justice is, at the same time, a set of practices (such as mediation, restorative circles or family conferences), an approach based on values, as we will see later, and, for some, a philosophy of life (Sullivan & Tifft, 2001; Walgrave, 2008; Zehr, 2009). At the centre is the recognition and repair of the harm caused by a wrong, an offence, a crime, not only in material terms, but also in moral, relational and symbolic sense (Zehr, 1990). Reparation can take many forms, but what makes it truly "restorative" is that it is the result of awareness, responsibility and willingness, not of external imposition (McCold & Wachtel, 2001; 2003; Walgrave, 2008).

Restorative justice promotes the active participation of those involved: not only the perpetrator, but also the victim and, where possible, members of the community. This involvement is structural to the process itself. As Johnstone and Van Ness (2007) point out, meeting, when possible, is one of the most powerful moments for taking responsibility,

listening to each other and building reparation together. It is not a question of "doing justice instead of", but "together with" (McCold & Wachtel, 2001; 2003). Responsibility, from a restorative perspective, is not equivalent to blame. It is rather a conscious recognition of the impact of one's actions on others. This type of responsibility is based on a relational ethic rather than a punitive logic. Braithwaite (2002) refers to "reintegrative shaming" as a mechanism through which mistakes are acknowledged without permanently labelling the person, thus allowing for genuine paths of change and rebuilding trust. In restorative justice, the concept of accountability differs from that of responsibility. It is, in fact, an active and relational process in which the offender is called upon to recognise the impact of their actions, listen to the victim's experience and make a concrete commitment to repair the harm. As Zehr (1990) states, "being accountable means going beyond simply saying 'I'm sorry'; it means coming to terms with the consequences of one's actions and taking responsibility for responding to those who have been harmed" (p. 187). In this perspective, accountability is deeply connected to dignity and the possibility of change: it is not a label, but an opportunity for transformation. McCold and Wachtel (2003) emphasise that "genuine accountability arises when the perpetrator understands the impact of their behaviour and voluntarily engages in a process of reparation" (p. 172). So, accountability in restorative justice is a journey that requires awareness, listening and a willingness to rebuild broken bonds.

Deep listening is a fundamental instrument of restorative justice: it is not simply "giving a voice" to victims and perpetrators but creating the conditions for their experiences to be accepted and recognised. Recognising pain, impact and the need for reparation is often the first step towards transforming conflict. As Mannozzi and Lodigiani (2025) point out, listening in restorative justice is based on respect, suspension of judgement and a willingness to accept the complexity of the other person.

Voluntariness is one of the cornerstones of restorative justice: all participation must be free, informed and revocable at any time. This applies to both the victim and the offender. Directive 2012/29/EU clearly states this, establishing that access to restorative justice programmes must be "based on free and informed consent" and that this consent may be withdrawn at any stage of the process[6]. Citing again Mannozzi and Lodigiani (2025), "voluntariness is not just a procedural condition, but an ethical prerequisite that guarantees the authenticity of the encounter and the dignity of those involved" (Ivi, p. 98). McCold

[6]In Directive 2012/29/EU of the European Parliament and of the Council of 25 October 2012 establishing minimum standards on the rights, support and protection of victims of crime, the reference to voluntariness is found in Recital (46) and Article 12.

(2000) also insists that “deciding for people is fundamentally non-restorative” (Ivi, p. 397), even if done with good intentions.

Restorative justice is based on a relational view of crime: it is not simply a violation of a rule, but a breakdown of bonds between people. In this perspective, “crime is a violation of people and relationships, and justice requires the repair of those violations” (Zehr, 1990, p. 181). As Johnstone and Van Ness (2007) argue, in addition to repairing harm, restorative justice can lead to profound transformation in individuals, relationships and social contexts. As we will see later, the “transformative conception” of restorative justice is central. In this sense, the reference is to that dimension of restorative justice that is not limited to "repair," but aims to modify the conditions that made the harm, crime, or injustice possible. Finally, one of the most significant effects of restorative justice is its ability to generate empowerment, i.e. to restore power, voice and capacity to act to those involved in the harm/crime/conflict (Braithwaite, 2002). This applies both to victims, who are often marginalised in traditional criminal proceedings, and to offenders, who can be recognised as individuals capable of responsibility and change. As Zehr (1990) points out, restorative justice seeks to give voice to those who have been silenced and power to those who have been deprived of it. Empowerment is achieved through active involvement in decision-making, the opportunity to express one's needs and the co-construction of meaningful solutions. McCold and Wachtel (2003) point out that the most effective restorative processes are those in which all parties are involved in an equitable and respectful manner, in a context that promotes accountability and dignity. In this sense, restorative justice is not limited to “doing justice” but becomes a space for relational and social emancipation. Zehr's words on the matter are particularly eloquent: “Restorative Justice is a process to involve, to the extent possible, those who have a stake in a specific offense and to collectively identify and address harms, needs, and obligations, in order to heal and put things as right as possible” (2002, p. 37).

2.1. From retributive justice to restorative justice

Retributive justice and restorative justice represent two profoundly different paradigms in the way of concept of justice, crime, responsibility and the social response to harm are conceived. According to Zehr (2002), retributive justice is based on a legal-formal logic in which crime is considered a violation of state law, and justice consists of identifying the guilty party and imposing a proportionate punishment. In this model, the central questions are: “What laws have been broken?”, “Who did it?” and “What do they deserve?” (Zehr, 2002, p. 20). The focus is therefore on the violation of the law, which requires the

offender to suffer the punishment that is prescribed and deserved. In this case, the victim of the crime is the state whose laws have been violated (Zehr, 1990), completely nullifying the role of the person harmed by the crime. The victim therefore acts as a witness as a means of reconstructing the truth in court. Each violation corresponds to a punishment that the offender is required to pay with guilt and suffering. In contrast, restorative justice assumes that crime is a violation of people and relationships, and that justice consists of repairing the harm, actively involving all parties concerned. The fundamental questions then become: "Who has been hurt?", "What are their needs?", and "Whose obligations are these?" (Zehr, 2002, p. 20). The focus is not on who committed the crime and what they deserve, but on the wrongdoing that was committed and the consequences that follow. Therefore, the means of restoring justice and relational balance is not punishment, but the opportunity for all parties involved (perpetrator, victim, community) to participate in processes specifically designed to address the harm caused and suffered, the needs, loss and pain (Wright, 2002; 2010; Zehr, 2002). While retributive justice tends to exclude the victim from the process, restorative justice places them at the centre, recognising their voice, dignity and opportunity to participate. In the classic retributive model, responsibility is primarily translated into the attribution of blame and the application of a punishment proportionate to the seriousness of the offence (Patrizi, 2024). The perpetrator is considered responsible in a legal-formal sense, and their responsibility is exhausted by serving the sentence imposed by the state. In this scheme, the victim plays a marginal role, and the conflict is "expropriated" from the parties to be handled by legal professionals (Christie, 1977, p. 7). In contrast, in restorative justice, accountability takes on a relational and transformative form: it is not just a matter of recognising the violation of the norm, but of understanding the concrete impact of one's behaviour on others and taking responsibility for repairing it. This does not mean ignoring the legal value of crimes or of those involved (perpetrators and victims), but considering them first and foremost as people rather than legal labels, so that what a person has done or suffered can be separated from who they are, and behaviours can be interpreted as actions that cause harm and not just as crimes, which are a legal definition (Lodi et al., 2022; Patrizi, 2024; Perrella et al., 2024; Zehr, 2002). Restorative justice, therefore, allows those who have suffered harm, those responsible for it and members of the community to become involved in "repairing" what has been done and achieving justice. As we will see later, the focus is on the needs of the protagonists (Braithwaite, 2002; McCold, 2001; Zehr, 2002): compensation for the victim, the perpetrator's assumption of responsibility for both their behaviour and its consequences, the restoration of trust in relationships and security for the community.

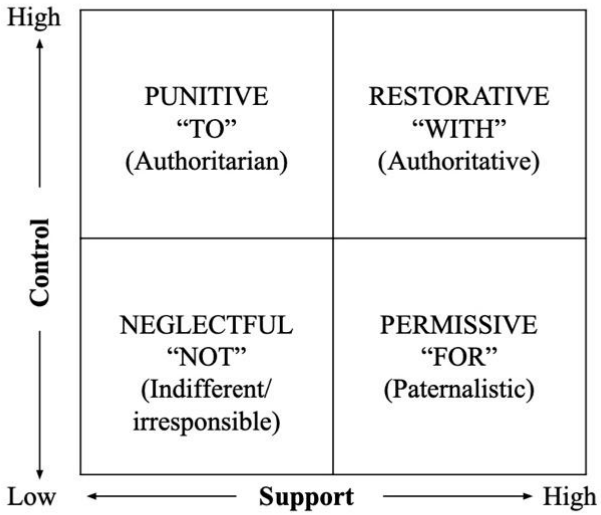
Therefore, retributive justice focuses on the violation of the norm and the attribution of blame, while restorative justice focuses on the harm caused and the necessity of addressing the resulting needs through the active involvement of those affected (Zehr, 2002). In this sense, retributive justice tends to be vertical and state-centric, while restorative justice is horizontal and relational. Kathleen Daly (2002) has also criticised the dichotomous representation of the two models, pointing out that, although restorative justice presents itself as an alternative to punishment, it is not simply the "opposite" of retributive justice. Rather, it proposes a redefinition of the very concept of justice, based on dialogue, recognition and shared responsibility. Daly calls for simplifications to be overcome and for recognition that, in some contexts, retributive and restorative elements can coexist in a complementary way.
From a psychological perspective, Wenzel et al. (2008) distinguish between two modes of response to crime: retributive justice, which aims to restore balance through punishment, and restorative justice, which seeks to rebuild a shared value consensus through a bilateral process.
Finally, authors such as John Braithwaite (2002) have highlighted that restorative justice is not just a set of practices, but a normative paradigm that challenges the retributive foundations of the modern criminal justice system, proposing a more inclusive, participatory and transformative justice.

Restorative justice (and restorative practices) is not only concerned with criminal behaviour. Indeed, restorative justice can also be applied in response to conflicts and harm (or violation of social expectations) that may occur in one's everyday life contexts (e.g. at work, in the family, in the local community) to promote peaceful management/resolution strategies. Moreover, this paradigm represents a preventive approach aimed at caring for social bonds and, in this perspective, restorative justice promotes lifestyles aimed at a social sense of justice in relationships, support, trust, inclusion, cohesion, equity, and peace. Wachtel (2013) defines restorative justice as a generative social bonding and well-being process. This approach cuts across all contexts: families, schools, neighbourhoods and local communities, political and administrative organisations, workplaces, and formal justice systems. According to the author, restorative justice (and its practices) aims to develop societies based on mutual support, accountability and participation. Fundamental, however, is that all people, at all levels, actively collaborate and cooperate because it is only by doing things *with people* that positive changes can be generated.

In this regard, McCold and Watchel (2001) introduced the "Social Discipline Window". It outlines patterns of response to harmful behaviour and its consequences to maintain social discipline. Different possibilities arise depending on the combination of high

or low control and high or low support, which can also be read in terms of responsibility and accountability for the control axis and social support and relationships for the support axis (Chapman, 2012).

Figure 1. Adaptation of Social Discipline Window (McCold & Wachtel, 2001)



Four "quadrants" are generated: punitive (authoritarian), negligent (irresponsible), permissive (paternalistic) and restorative (authoritative). The punitive response is characterised by high control and low support (or high responsibility/accountability and low social support/relations). In this quadrant are the authoritarian models of response to behaviour that transgresses social expectations (McCold & Wachtel, 2001). This response model is characterised by stigmatising, coercive and punitive attitudes (Chapman, 2012). The restorative quadrant, on the other hand, refers to doing things 'with' people. It is characterised by high control and support (or high responsibility and social support). In Chapman's (2012) developments, it is the model of acting with respect, understood as recognising the other person as a person and acknowledging what he or she feels. It is characterised by authoritativeness, the ability to assume one's responsibilities and ask the other to assume their responsibilities with respect. It is the inclusive, participatory and transformative quadrant of relationships but also of systems.

Considering what we have seen so far, it also seems appropriate to point out that, as previously mentioned, restorative justice is not immune to erroneous and false attributions and interpretations. So, what is not restorative justice? As Zehr (2002) explains, restorative justice "is not primarily about forgiveness or reconciliation […], is not mediation […], is not primarily designed to reduce recidivism […], is not a particular program or a blueprint […],is not primarily intended for "minor" offences or first-time offenders […], is neither a panacea

nor necessarily a replacement for the legal system […], is not necessarily the opposite of retribution" (*Ibidem*, p. 8-13). The author's reflections highlight, first and foremost, that restorative justice is not a panacea in the sense that it is not and does not claim to be a universal remedy, good for all problems and capable of solving all problems.

Furthermore, restorative justice is not reparation in the sense of compensation and/or alternative dispute resolution. In this sense, it should be emphasised that restorative justice and Alternative Dispute Resolution (ADR) are not the same thing, even though they may sometimes appear similar or be (erroneously) placed on the same level. The difference lies as much in the core values as in the underlying aims of the two approaches. ADR originated as a practical method of resolving civil disputes more quickly and less formally than through the courts (Patrizi, 2024; Zehr, 2002). Restorative justice, on the other hand, has its roots in a relational ethic that aims not so much to "settle" disputes as to rebuild relationships, responsibility and trust when harm has been done, often in the criminal sphere. As Daly (2002) has observed, restorative justice "is not a type of dispute resolution, it's a justice mechanism" (*Ibidem*, p. 7). Braithwaite (2002) also states this clearly: "Restorative justice is fundamentally justice, not alternative dispute resolution. It is a distinctive form of justice that redefines what justice means" (*Ibidem*, p. 12). Therefore, although they may share some techniques (such as mediation), restorative justice has a transformative and restorative purpose, while ADR is more oriented towards the functional resolution of disputes.

Starting from what Zehr clearly stated, restorative justice is not the same as forgiveness or reconciliation. If anything, forgiveness or reconciliation may represent a possible outcome but never the aim.

Restorative justice is suitable for all crimes, including violent ones (e.g. murder, sexual violence). Indeed, we could perhaps say that it is particularly suited to violent crimes, where there is more pain, more need to be heard, more need to start afresh from that moment onwards and reorient one's life. Here, a further important clarification is needed: restorative justice is not in conflict with the 2011 Istanbul Convention[7]. In fact, there is a misconception that it overlaps with Article 48, which prohibits "the mandatory use of alternative dispute resolution procedures, including mediation and conciliation, in relation to all forms of violence against women and domestic violence". However, as we have just seen, alternative dispute resolution (ADR), which is the subject of the Convention, is not restorative justice and the Convention therefore does not state that restorative justice is prohibited in cases of gender-based violence and domestic violence.

[7] Council of Europe Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence, ratified in Istanbul on 11 May 2011: https://rm.coe.int/168008482e.

As Zehr states, “restorative justice is not a specific programme [...]; it is not just mediation”. As we have seen above and as we will see in more detail in the following paragraphs, there are various restorative justice practices: for example, family group conferences and circles. Mediation is one such practice, but it is not the only one, although it is the main tool used in the criminal justice system (Wachtel, 2024). Furthermore, as Braithwaite (2002) states, restorative justice deals with addressing injustice and is not morally neutral in the face of it. This means that even in the case of crimes, mediation is not always the best practice (Braithwaite, 2024). Moreover, in the absence of a crime, it is very likely that it is not the most appropriate practice (think, for example, of schools or workplaces).

Finally, like forgiveness and reconciliation, it is not aimed at preventing recidivism. Here too, reducing recidivism may be a consequence of participating in restorative justice programmes. When a person acknowledges their responsibility for the harm caused (in the sense of accountability), it is more likely not to repeat that behaviour (Chapman, 2024; Perrella et al., 2024).

2.2. Values and principles

The philosophy behind restorative justice is based on the recognition of every human being as a person with dignity, needs, relationships and potential. For this reason, respect for human dignity is the fundamental value from which all others derive: it is what allows everyone to feel safe, recognised, listened to and protected (EFRJ, 2018). Each person is unique, with a unique history, and lives immersed in relationships that influence their well-being and sense of belonging. The quality of these relationships is therefore essential for social cohesion and for building a justice system that is not limited to punishment but knows how to regenerate bonds and accompany people in the process of mutual recognition. As Zehr (1990) points out, restorative justice is based on a relational view of human beings, in which crime is a rupture in relationships and justice consists in “repairing the relational obligations” that arise from it (p. 181). In this perspective, the value of responsibility is not only individual but also social: it is about taking responsibility for one's actions and their consequences, but also about contributing to the reconstruction of the torn relational fabric (McCold & Wachtel, 2003, p. 172).

Another core value is solidarity, understood not as charity, but as recognition of the interdependence between people and the need to address the harm suffered together. Restorative justice creates spaces for dialogue in which those involved – victims, perpetrators, communities – can express their emotions, needs and expectations in a climate of mutual listening and respect (Suzuki & Yuan, 2021).

The value of truth takes on a particular meaning: it is not a procedural or absolute truth, but a plural and narrative truth that emerges from the comparison of the stories of each person involved. As the EFRJ (2021) states, "truth in restorative justice is constructed through dialogue, not imposed by an external authority". This approach allows for the recognition of the complexity of experiences and gives meaning to the experience of harm.
Finally, the value of justice itself is reinterpreted: no longer as the mere application of the law, but as a shared search for balance, recognition and reparation. It is a justice that is built together and based on accountability, fairness and participation (Braithwaite, 2002; EFRJ, 2018).

The principles of restorative justice represent the ethical and operational guidelines that inform the implementation of restorative programmes, ensuring consistency with fundamental values and protection for all parties involved. At international level, these principles have been outlined in fundamental documents such as UN Resolution No. 2002/12 (ECOSOC) and have been taken up and developed at European level by Directive 2012/29/EU. In Italy, the Cartabia reform introduced comprehensive regulations on restorative justice for the first time with Law No. 150 of 10 October 2022[8], which inserted Article 129-bis into the Code of Criminal Procedure and Article 45-ter into the implementing provisions. The legislator has incorporated international principles, defining restorative justice as an autonomous system parallel to criminal justice, based on consent, safety, confidentiality, fairness, independence of mediators and active participation of the parties.
Restorative justice is based on a set of principles that are not mere procedural requirements, but rather a concrete expression of its vision of human beings, harm and conflict. These principles, shared by legal doctrine and codified at the regulatory level, outline the conditions for a restorative process to be considered authentic, ethically sustainable and transformative.

a) Voluntariness: Recommendation CM/Rec(2018)8 establishes that participation in restorative justice programmes must be "voluntary, with the free and informed consent of the parties" (Principle 2.1). No one can be forced to participate in a restorative justice process: it is a process that requires free, informed and revocable consent. According to McCold (2000), coercing participation, even with the best of intentions, is tantamount to betraying the very essence of restorative justice. Only in freedom can honest responsibility and meaningful reparation arise. Forced or instrumental participation would compromise its authenticity.

[8] https://www.gazzettaufficiale.it/eli/gu/2022/10/17/243/so/38/sg/pdf.

b) Confidentiality: the principle of confidentiality prohibits the use of statements made during the restorative process (including in criminal proceedings), unless the parties agree otherwise (CM/Rec(2018)8, Principle 2.5)[9]. The aim is to safeguard and protect the trust and security of the relationship between the people involved, so that everyone can feel safe in telling their story, expressing their needs and emotions, and building an authentic dialogue.

c) Impartiality and independence of the facilitator: according to the Recommendation (Principle 2.3), facilitators must be "trained, impartial and independent"[10]. The principle of impartiality of the facilitator ensures that the process takes place in a climate of fairness. The concept of multi-partiality and equidistance specifies the impartiality of the judge in a profoundly different way from that of the facilitator. Indeed, the facilitators are responsible for ensuring the safety of the space and protecting the symmetry of the dialogue by welcoming all voices. Mannozzi and Lodigiani (2025) define them as "guardians of fair frameworks", who allow the actors in the process to move freely and with mutual respect.

d) Centrality of the parties and active participation: The Recommendation (Principle 1.2) emphasises that restorative justice must "place the people involved at the centre", promoting their active and meaningful participation[11]. In the restorative perspective, those who have suffered harm and those who have caused it are not objects but subjects of the process. Johnstone and Van Ness (2007) speak of a "meaningful encounter" between the people involved, an encounter that gives voice to those who have been silenced and responsibility to those who are called upon to make reparation. This is linked to the principle of listening. In the restorative paradigm, listening means opening oneself to the other's story, even when it is uncomfortable or painful. It is through listening that recognition and change are generated. Zehr (1990) emphasises that deep listening is the restorative act par

[9] Under Italian law, the principle of confidentiality is protected by Article 45-ter of the Code of Criminal Procedure, which prohibits the use of statements made during the restorative process in criminal proceedings, unless the parties agree otherwise. Italian case law has confirmed that a breach of confidentiality may render documents inadmissible (Court of Cassation, Section V, judgment no. 28456/2024).

[10] This principle has been implemented in Italy with the obligation for professionals (who are called mediators) to register on a list kept by the Ministry of Justice (Article 45-quater of the implementing provisions of the Code of Criminal Procedure). Case law has clarified that the absence of guarantees of impartiality may compromise the validity of the proceedings and the possible procedural relevance of the outcome (Court of Milan, Italy, order of 15 November 2023).

[11] The Italian Court of Cassation has emphasised this principle in relation to the assessment of the outcome of the restorative process for the purposes of determining the sentence (Court of Cassation, Section III, judgment no. 9876/2024), stating that the effective involvement of the victim and the offender is an indication of the authenticity and transformative value of the process.

excellence, because it allows us to go beyond judgement and enter the complexity of the relational experience.

e) Safety and protection of parties: the Recommendation (Principle 2.4) states that it is an essential prerequisite that programmes are structured in such a way as to "avoid any risk of secondary victimisation"[12]. Restorative justice requires a space where people can tell their story without fear of being traumatised again or exposed to further harm.

Finally, it is also worth mentioning the principle of proportionality and realism, which refers to the need for the outcomes of the process to be fair, sustainable and consistent with each person's possibilities. Reparation should not take a punitive or idealised form but should be co-constructed in the concrete reality of relationships. Walgrave (2008) insists that restorative justice should not be oriented towards maximum severity, but towards maximum meaning.

When fully applied, these principles make restorative justice not only an alternative model of conflict management, but also an authentic practice of relational democracy. It is in these principles that the transition from vertical justice to participatory justice is manifested, capable of recognising and transforming people in the spirit of shared responsibility.

2.2.1. Encounter, reparation, transformation

Restorative justice is expressed through three fundamental conceptions – encounter, reparation, transformation – which outline its relational nature, its restorative purpose and its regenerative potential. These perspectives, defined by Johnstone and Van Ness (2007) as "typological lenses", have also been fully incorporated into the United Nations Handbook on Restorative Justice Programmes[13] (UNODC, 2006), where they are presented as complementary approaches that together outline the complex and dynamic identity of the restorative paradigm.

The concept of *encounter* is based on the idea that crime should not be dealt with solely by the state, but returned, in conditions of safety, to the people involved. The encounter between the victim, the offender and, sometimes, members of the community, is a space for radical dialogue, in which everyone can tell their story and listen to others. Marshall (1985) defined restorative justice as "a process in which all those involved come together to decide how to

[12] In Italy, Article 129-bis of the Code of Criminal Procedure requires the judge to verify the suitability of the programme to ensure the safety of the parties. Case law has confirmed that, in situations of vulnerability, the judge may deny access to the restorative programme or suspend it (Court of Cassation, Section I, judgment no. 11234/2023).

[13] https://www.unodc.org/pdf/criminal_justice/Handbook_on_Restorative_Justice_Programmes.pdf

deal with the consequences of the crime" (p. 5). Van Ness et al. (2022) highlighted that the encounter has value even where tangible reparation is impossible, because it humanises the conflict and gives meaning to suffering. The encounter is a place of mutual presence, where the crime is returned to the people who experienced it, so that it does not remain confined to technical language or appropriated by logic that is foreign to their experience. Here, the conflict regains a human dimension, made up of glances, words, pauses and silences. It is the moment when the other becomes a "face", according to an interpretation that recalls Emmanuel Lévinas' ethics of responsibility (1961), and where the victim can finally be heard not only as the injured party, but as a human being with a history, suffering and a need for recognition (Van Ness et al., 2022). It is also the moment when the perpetrator can escape the legal reduction of their conduct and regain a space of full responsibility.

The concept of *restoration* broadens the focus beyond confrontation, concentrating on a concrete response to the harm done. It is not a question of offering merely material "compensation", but of recognising the victim's need to have their dignity restored and the perpetrator's need to be involved in a process of responsibility that does not destroy but rebuilds. Van Ness et al. (2022) propose a broad vision in which reparation can also include a commitment to transforming the social conditions that led to the harm. Restoration, therefore, is not just a possible outcome of the process, but an ethical movement through which we seek to restore, as far as possible, what has been broken. The authors propose thinking about restoration not in purely material terms, but as restoring justice: a process that involves acknowledging the harm, caring for the victim's needs and committing to remedy the situation. This view is also consistent with the idea of care as a legal-relational category (Gilligan, 1982; Held, 2006), in which reparation is not an imposed obligation but a gesture that rebuilds bonds, responsibility and proximity.

Finally, the concept of *transformation* embodies the capacity of the restorative process to go beyond the management of individual conflicts to question and change the relationships, norms and structures that generated them. Llewellyn (2011) proposes a model of relational justice in which transformation is not a "side effect" of reparation but an intentional component. Sullivan and Tifft (2001) see restorative justice as a "way of being in the world", rooted in ethical responsibility and the construction of more just communities. This view also connects to the concept of "transformative justice", which has developed in feminist and decolonial circles to address structural injustices, as highlighted by McAlinden et al. (2025). In the legal sphere, this dimension tends to be interpreted prudently, as a "secondary effect" of the process; however, several authors have recognised its structural nature. For example, Llewellyn (2011) speaks of justice as transformative relationality, and Sullivan and

Tifft (2001) describe restorative justice as a way of living social relationships in everyday life, as an ethic that can generate personal, but also institutional and cultural change. In this sense, transformation can also concern the legal culture itself, the way we conceive of responsibility, punishment and recognition.

Together, these three conceptions restore the idea of a justice that is not limited to administering, but that listens, repairs and – if conditions allow – generates change. A justice that arises from relationships and finds its deepest meaning in relationships.

2.3. Restorative justice and prevention

Restorative justice is not only a response to a crime that has already been committed, but can also act as a preventive measure, capable of reducing the likelihood of the harm being repeated. Paul McCold (2005) introduced the concept of prevention feedback, i.e. the potential of restorative justice to generate transformative learning in those involved, such as to change future behaviour and strengthen social cohesion. According to McCold, when people actively participate in a restorative process — listening, acknowledging, taking responsibility — a cycle of awareness is activated that can prevent the repetition of harm, not through external deterrence, but through relational internalisation. The McCold model identifies three levels of prevention in restorative justice: primary prevention, when the goal is to strengthen social ties and a culture of dialogue before harm occurs; secondary prevention, when it steps in to situations of risk; tertiary prevention, when it acts to reduce recidivism (McCold, 2005). This perspective is also shared by the United Nations Handbook on Restorative Justice Programmes (UNODC, 2006), which recognises the role of restorative justice in secondary and tertiary prevention, especially when integrated into educational or community contexts. In particular, the UNODC emphasises that restorative processes can strengthen the emotional, communicative and relational capacities of participants, reducing the risk factors associated with recidivism. As Hass-Wisecup and Saxon (2021) observe, prevention in restorative justice is not a side effect, but one of its deepest vocations: "when people feel heard, recognised and involved, they are less likely to seek destructive responses to their unmet needs" (p. 214). In this sense, prevention is not only a goal but a natural consequence of a justice system that cares about relationships.

In education, restorative justice has proven particularly effective in preventing problematic behaviour and improving the school climate (Fronius et al., 2019; Lodi et al., 2022). Research has also highlighted this potential and, as we will see later (see Chapter II), has shown that restorative processes, especially in the juvenile context, can serve as tools for relational prevention, reducing negative behaviour, violence, inequality and stigmatisation,

and promoting social, interpersonal and emotional skills. As Vaandering (2014a) points out, restorative justice in schools is not just an alternative disciplinary technique, but a cultural approach that builds educational communities based on respect, listening and shared responsibility. In this sense, prevention is not an external goal but a natural consequence of a healthy relational environment.

At the community level, restorative justice can also serve as a tool for social prevention. In contexts characterised by marginalisation, distrust of institutions or intergroup conflicts, restorative processes can strengthen a sense of belonging, civic participation and the collective capacity to manage tensions (Lanni, 2022; Patrizi, 2024, Perrella et al., 2024). Community prevention through restorative justice is not based on control, but on shared care for the social fabric.

One area where restorative justice has proven effective is in preventing recidivism, i.e. reducing the likelihood that a person will reoffend. Unlike punitive models, which often lead to exclusion and stigmatisation, restorative justice promotes a process of active empowerment and social reintegration, which can break the cycle of violence. Both the United Nations and the European Forum for Restorative Justice[14] have expressed their views on this matter, emphasising that restorative justice, through dialogue, reparation and mutual recognition, can "reduce the frequency and severity of recidivism, particularly when it is part of a broader rehabilitation process". Dandurand (2016) also pointed out that restorative justice can facilitate the social reintegration of offenders because it offers a meaningful alternative to the marginalisation (e.g. prison) produced by the traditional criminal justice system. The opportunity to be heard, to make amends and to be accepted back into the community is a fundamental step towards achieving this goal. As Sherman and Strang (2007) argue, reducing recidivism is not a "side effect" of restorative justice, but "a logical consequence of it": when people are involved in processes that treat them with respect, help them understand the impact of their actions and offer them a second chance, they are more likely to choose not to repeat harmful behaviour.

Figure 2. Punitive prevention vs restorative prevention

Dimension	Punitive Prevention	Restorative Prevention
Purpose	Deterrence: avoiding crime through the threat of punishment	Responsibility: preventing harm through dialogue, relationship care, and ethical learning

[14] United Nations document entitled Model Strategies on Reducing Reoffending, prepared by the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) on behalf of the General Assembly (resolution 76/182 of 2021 and subsequently 77/232 of 2022). The document was prepared by an intergovernmental group of experts and presented to the Commission on Crime Prevention and Criminal Justice. In particular, the contribution of the European Forum for Restorative Justice (EFRJ) of July 2022 emphasises that restorative justice can reduce the frequency and severity of recidivism, especially when integrated into a broader rehabilitation process.

Motivation	Fear of sanction	Understanding the impact and internalizing a sense of justice
Main actor	The State: monopoly on punishment via courts and law enforcement	The people involved: victim, offender, and community act together to prevent and repair
Central tool	Punishment, incarceration, sanctions	Dialogue, mediation, talking circles, restorative agreements
Effect on recidivism	Questionable deterrent effect, often ineffective (Sherman & Strang, 2007)	Significant reduction in reoffending, especially among youth (Dandurand, 2016; EFRJ, 2022)
View of the person	The individual is the object of judgment and the target of punishment	The individual is a relational subject capable of change and shared responsibility
Attention to context	Socioeconomic and relational factors usually ignored	Social context, relationships, and vulnerabilities are central
Expected outcome	Risk containment through punishment	Safety through social connection and accountability

The proposed comparison in figure 2 between punitive and restorative prevention highlights a paradigmatic difference: the former is based on the idea of control and surveillance (the punitive quadrant of the social discipline window) and seeks to prevent harm through the threat of punishment; the latter is based on dialogue and responsibility (the restorative quadrant of the social discipline window) with a view to reintegration and aims to deactivate the relational and cultural conditions that make harm possible. Some studies (e.g. Sherman & Strang, 2007) show that the deterrent effect of punishment is limited, especially if the person does not recognise the legitimacy of the system. On the contrary, restorative justice works precisely on this recognition, creating experiences of lived and shared justice. It is in this sense that McCold (2005) speaks of "transformative feedback": not fear of punishment, but a change of perspective.

Although restorative justice is often presented as a paradigm capable of generating prevention through empowerment and the rebuilding of social ties, it is important to recognise its structural, operational and cultural limitations. As Daly (2005) observes, one of the main weaknesses lies in power inequalities and unequal participation: victims do not always choose to participate in the process, and not all offenders are willing to take genuine responsibility. In such cases, prevention risks remaining partial or symbolic. Other critical issues arise at the operational level. In many countries, restorative programmes suffer from a lack of resources, qualified personnel and institutional support (UNODC, 2020). Without stable investment, restorative justice is unable to generate systemic impact. Furthermore, the regulatory or cultural ambiguity that still surrounds restorative justice contributes to limiting its adoption in more complex or conflictual contexts (Crawford & Newburn, 2003). A further risk concerns instrumentalization. When restorative pathways are promoted to ease the judicial burden or obtain procedural advantages, their transformative function is undermined (Magaraggia, 2020). Finally, restorative justice may encounter limitations in cases of serious or structural violence. As Takagi and Shank (2004) argue, in contexts marked by collective

trauma or oppressive systems, individual reparation may be insufficient if not accompanied by deeper collective change. In such scenarios, prevention requires not only listening but also transforming the conditions that produced the harm. These critical issues do not negate the value of restorative justice, but they do require its conscious application, contextualised and supported by coherent public policies.

For restorative justice to fully express its preventive potential, it is essential that it be based on solid practice, rooted in a relational culture and supported by adequate institutional recognition. The literature agrees that prevention is not an automatic effect of the restorative process, but the result of specific and integrated conditions (McCold, 2005; UNODC, 2020). First and foremost, accessibility to programmes is crucial: restorative justice must be available at every stage of the process and for a variety of situations, not only for minor offences or in privileged contexts (UNODC, 2020). Furthermore, genuine participation requires time and preparation: the parties involved must be accompanied by trained facilitators who are able to create a safe, fair and respectful space (EFRJ, 2022). Another key condition is institutional support. Restorative prevention is most effective when it is part of a system that recognises its value and supports it with stable resources, local networks and interprofessional cooperation (Maglione et al., 2024). Finally, the active involvement of communities is essential. They must be part of the process not only as a "background", but as responsible actors in the construction of shared justice and security (Rosenblatt, 2015).

3. From paradigm to programmes and practices

After exploring restorative justice as a paradigm — that is, as an interpretative lens capable of redefining the very meaning of justice, responsibility and reparation — it is necessary to ask how this vision translates into concrete programmes and operational practices. As Zehr (1990) point out, the transition from paradigm to practice is neither linear nor automatic: it requires adaptation, contextualisation and ethical consistency. Otherwise, there is a risk that restorative justice will be reduced to a procedural technique, emptied of its transformative potential. The paradigm shift described by the author — which calls for a shift in focus from crime as a violation of the law to harm as a breakdown of relationships — finds concrete expression in a variety of operational models, such as mediation in criminal procedure, family group conferences, talking circles, and school and community programmes. These practices, despite their diversity, share some fundamental elements: voluntary participation, facilitated dialogue, the centrality of those involved and the goal of repairing the harm in a meaningful way.

The UNODC (2020) also emphasises that restorative justice is not a single model, but a set of flexible approaches that can be adapted to different cultural, legal and social contexts. These practices can be classified into four general models: mediation, restorative conferences, restorative circles and community practices. Although there are structural differences, they all share some key elements: voluntary participation, impartial facilitation, safety of the parties and a focus on responsibility and reparation.

Victim-offender mediation (VOM) is one of the most established and studied forms. It consists of a direct or indirect meeting between the victim and the offender, facilitated by an impartial and qualified third party. According to Umbreit et al. (2001), mediation promotes authentic communication, allows emotions to be expressed and can result in a restorative agreement, but its main value lies in reconnecting relationships.

Inspired by the New Zealand Family Group Conferences model in 1989 as part of the Children, Young Persons, and Their Families Act[15], conferences involve the victim, perpetrator, family members, educators and professionals in a collective process aimed at building a shared response to the harm. As Zinsstag and Vanfraechem (2012) point out, the strength of this model lies in its ability to attribute relational meaning to responsibility, promoting community and shared responses.

Restorative Circles are based on indigenous traditions (First Nations, Māori) and are now recognised as practices with high transformative potential (Pranis, 2005). These are facilitated circle meetings in which all participants speak on an equal footing to address a harmful event, conflict or collective need. A distinction is made between preventive circles (community building), reactive circles (response to harm) and healing circles, emphasising the importance of the cultural context, the narrative rhythm and the centrality of relational safety (UNODC, 2020).

Community Restorative Boards and other community models involve citizens, local authorities, social services and sometimes the victims themselves in dialogue and repair processes in relation to minor offences or conflicts. These are forms of proximity justice that value social capital and active participation. As Bazemore and Umbreit (2001) observe, these models promote civic engagement, social reintegration and the direct involvement of the community as a legal and moral entity.

[15] The Children, Young Persons, and Their Families Act 1989, now known as the Oranga Tamariki Act 1989, is a New Zealand law focused on promoting the well-being of children, young people, and their families. It emphasizes family and community involvement in decision-making regarding children in need of care or protection or those who have offended against the law: https://www.legislation.govt.nz/act/public/1989/0024/65.0/DLM147088.html.

The UNODC Handbook emphasises that the success of such practices depends on the credibility of the facilitators, local roots and the ability of communities to sustain accountability over time.

All these models require specialised training, monitoring of practices, impact assessment and a coherent regulatory framework, as recommended at international level (UNODC, 2020; EFRJ, 2022). Their effectiveness depends not only on the methodology adopted, but also on the quality of the relationships involved in the process and the degree of social and institutional recognition. According to McCold and Wachtel (2003, p. 3), restorative justice is a process that actively and directly involves the three primary stakeholders: the victim, the perpetrator and the community. Only when all three are present and participate in a meaningful way can we speak of a fully restorative process. This approach is reflected in their types of restorative practices, which distinguish between:

- Partly restorative practices: where only one of the parties involved is involved (e.g. victim services).
- Mostly restorative practices: where only two of the parties involved are involved (e.g. mediation in criminal matters).
- Fully restorative practices: in which all three parties involved actively participate (e.g., restorative circles or conferences).

This classification helps to understand the relational depth of the different practices and to assess their consistency with the restorative paradigm. In addition, the authors propose the Social Discipline Window model (McCold & Wachtel, 2001) which, as seen in the previous paragraph (see in particular paragraph 2.1. and Figure 1), intersects two axes: control (demanding responsibility) and support (offering listening and care). Restorative justice falls within the "with" quadrant (high control + high support), where we work with people, not on them or for them. From the perspective of the three types of restorative justice, this quadrant represents "[...] the degree to which any form of social discipline can be defined as fully restorative" (McCold & Wachtel, 2003, p. 3).

Although restorative justice is based on profound ethical principles — such as relational responsibility, voluntary participation and genuine reparation for harm — its growing popularity has led, in some contexts, to an instrumental use of practices, which risks emptying them of their transformative meaning. As McCold and Wachtel (2003) observe, a practice can only be considered fully restorative if it actively involves the three key stakeholders: the victim, the offender and the community. However, in many cases, practices

are implemented in a partial or distorted manner, for example to lighten the judicial load, obtain procedural benefits or respond to administrative efficiency considerations. In such cases, restorative justice is reduced to a "procedural technique", losing its relational and transformative dimension. Magaraggia (2020) explicitly refers to "institutional instrumentalization", referring to contexts in which restorative practices are adopted for purposes unrelated to the needs of the parties involved. For example, when the offender participates in a restorative process solely to obtain a reduced sentence, or when the victim is involved without adequate preparation, the process risks becoming a meaningless formality. The Handbook on Restorative Justice Programmes (UNODC, 2020) also warns against the adoption of "window dressing" practices, emphasising that the legitimacy of restorative justice depends on the quality of the process, not its label. The handbook recommends that programmes be based on clear ethical standards, trained facilitators and independent monitoring to avoid opportunistic abuses. Finally, Vanfraechem et al. (2010) emphasise that the instrumental use of practices can generate mistrust among victims and communities, especially when promises of listening and reparation are not kept. In such cases, restorative justice not only fails in its intent but also risks causing further harm.

4. Concluding thoughts

Restorative justice is not simply a procedural technique, but a transformative paradigm capable of redefining the very meaning of justice, responsibility and prevention. Starting from a theoretical-philosophical framework that values relationships as a fundamental category of recognition (Lévinas, 1961; 2002), the restorative paradigm has emerged as an alternative to retributive justice, capable of shifting the focus from crime as a violation of the law to harm as a breakdown of bonds between people.

A comparison with traditional forms of prevention has highlighted how restorative justice proposes a relational preventive model based on dialogue, shared responsibility and the reconstruction of trust, both individual and collective (Daly, 2005). While punitive prevention acts through the threat of punishment, restorative prevention works on the quality of relationships and the active involvement of people, strengthening their ability to live together and listen to each other. The literature clearly shows that restorative programmes, if implemented consistently, can significantly reduce recidivism (Sherman & Strang, 2007; Dandurand, 2016) and have positive effects on education and the community (Vaandering, 2014a; Rosenblatt, 2015).

However, these results are not automatic. The preventive effectiveness of restorative justice depends on specific conditions: accessibility, voluntariness, professional

competence, institutional support and community involvement (UNODC, 2020; EFRJ, 2022). In the absence of these conditions, the paradigm risks being emptied of meaning and practices becoming mere procedural tools, applied for purposes extrinsic to reparation. On this point, the literature is unanimous: the instrumental use of restorative justice, for example to obtain reduced sentences or lighten the procedural burden, risks undermining its ethical legitimacy (Abramson & Roberts, 2021; Magaraggia, 2020) and transformative power (McCold & Wachtel, 2003). Such applications risk transforming a relational process into a superficial procedure, producing a form of "adapted justice" that is not necessarily just.

Mapping the main practices (e.g. mediation, conferences, circles) shows how the transition from paradigm to practice involves the delicate work of translating ethical principles into operational tools. It is not the external form that defines a practice as restorative, but the degree of participation, responsibility and listening that it manages to activate (UNODC, 2020).

In conclusion, what emerges is the complexity and radical nature of the restorative paradigm, which does not merely offer alternatives to the criminal justice system, but proposes a vision of justice based on the recognition of the other, the repair of bonds and the construction of coexistence. It is a form of justice that does not operate *on people*, but *with people* (McCold & Wachtel, 2001; 2003) and, for this very reason, needs contexts that can support, protect and nurture its coherence.

CHAPTER II. THE CONTEXTS OF RESTORATIVE JUSTICE: TWO SYSTEMATIC LITERATURE REVIEW

The perspectives of the current international debate, also in the wake of the recent Recommendation CM/Rec (2018) 8 of the Council of Europe's Committee of Ministers about restorative justice in criminal matters[16], aim at encouraging not only the development and use of restorative justice in criminal matters, but also the development of innovative restorative approaches to be placed outside the justice systems, highlighting how justice and restorative practices do not only concern behaviours of criminal relevance. In fact, restorative justice and restorative practices can also play a role in various conflicts that arise in different communities (e.g. schools, prisons, local communities), not only as a response to conflict, but also as a preventive approach with the main objective of promoting individual and collective well-being, preventing recidivism and spreading a participatory sense of social security, with a view to improving social, community and cultural relations in general (Zehr, 1995). Therefore, after harm has been suffered, it may be necessary to rebuild trust and heal conflicts to heal people's wounds and fractures in the social fabric. The aim is to prevent behaviour that is harmful to the prospects of a better future: a future of security, trust, responsibility and well-being for all parties involved. In this sense, restorative justice can be presented as justice for people and relationships when a crime has been committed, harm has been caused, pain has been inflicted, with the aim of preventing harmful behaviour (Patrizi, 2024).

Today, public policies are questioning the need to promote and experiment with new actions/interventions that can better facilitate the promotion of well-being and optimal functioning of individuals, communities, organisations, and institutions, as well as improve the lives of all people and the safety of the places where people live, work, and operate (Wright, 1999). Also by virtue of the goals of Agenda 2030[17], which aim to counter/end phenomena of social exclusion and marginality, combat inequalities, and build peaceful societies that respect human rights, public policy attention is also directed towards the experimentation and promotion of new forms of local welfare in the areas of: peaceful management of conflicts; protection and listening to the victim, also with respect to the risks of secondary victimisation; active reintegration of offenders; promotion of opportunities for

[16] Recommendation cm/Rec(2018)8 of the Committee of Ministers to member States concerning restorative justice in criminal matters, https://rm.coe.int/cm-rec-2018-8-concerning-restorative-justice-in-criminal-matters-03-10/16808e3b08

[17] The 2030 Agenda, signed on 25 September 2015 by the governments of the 193 member countries of the United Nations, and approved by the UN General Assembly, consists of 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) – to be achieved in the environmental, economic, social and institutional by 2030.

participatory democracy as a tool for involving people and systems in the prevention of deviance, crime, recidivism; conflict situations within organisations; promotion of individual and collective well-being.

1. Restorative justice and restorative practices at school

Current zero-tolerance policies represent systems that use punitive and exclusionary practices (e.g., suspensions) to control and manage student behaviour. These policies very often aggravate disciplinary problems and exacerbate racial, gender, and socioeconomic status disparities, underlining the need for alternative approaches to the management of school discipline, as well as approaches that aim at promoting well-being in the whole school community. Restorative justice could represent one of these alternatives. Its practices are oriented not only at the alternative management of incorrect and violent behaviours, for example, bullying, but mainly at the promotion of prosocial behaviours through the development of social and emotional skills (e.g., empathy, awareness, and responsibility), with the broader goal of building safe school communities that promote well-being.

In recent years, the use of restorative justice and restorative practices in schools has grown rapidly. This encourages a better understanding of how theory and research address this question to further improve practices and ensure their application is based on scientific knowledge. Starting from existing qualitative and quantitative research, the aim of this study was the evaluation of the practices implemented, and the results obtained through a systematic literature review on the use of restorative justice and restorative practeces implemented at school. We wish to support practices by the existing findings in scientific research, listing the benefits of applying restorative justice and restorative practice in schools and analysing the impact of these approaches in educational settings.

Traditionally, school systems use prescriptive and punitive methods to manage, respond, and deal with bad behaviours that students display. These methods, known as zero-tolerance policies, involve actions of exclusion (e.g., suspensions and expulsions) that lead to the removal and isolation of students that commit illegal behaviour from both the school context and the community and that are put in place to enforce order within the schools themselves (Welch & Payne, 2012). The American Psychological Association (APA) Zero Tolerance Task Force (2008) analysing zero-tolerance policies, highlighted the negative consequences of these practices: intensification of the inequality of treatment with respect to Black students and urban school students with low socioeconomic status, higher likelihood of recurrence of deviant behaviour, dropout, higher likelihood of crime (Noltemeyer & Mcloughlin, 2010; Noltemeyer et al., 2015; Welch & Payne, 2010). To address these consequences, it is critical

that schools promote and experiment with alternative disciplinary methods, like restorative approaches and practices, to substitute zero-tolerance policies and punitive practices. However, it is essential to think of an approach that is promoted throughout the school, that should be focused not only on repairing harm in the event of conflicts and harmful/violent behaviours (e.g., bullying), but also on building and cultivating relationships, promoting both relational/emotional and peaceful conflict management skills, nonviolent communication, a sense of security, respect, well-being. In this sense, the interventions carried out in the context of restorative justice programs are framed in its promotional perspective, which is a proactive vision that, while acting on the conflict triggered by a harmful behaviour or other illicit actions (e.g., crime), looks at future development of people and their relationships, at their ability to prevent and deal with conflict as the best solution for coexistence. When this approach is applied to contexts such as schools, the aim of promotional prevention is perhaps more immediately visible: some behaviours cause harm, which creates needs, which require restorative responses; restorative responses meet needs, which repair harm; repairing the harm may or may not lead to the prevention of crime and/or harmful behaviour (McCold, 2005). Indeed, many programs developed in schools "can provide an opportunity for the community to provide an appropriate educational response to minor offences and other conflicts without formally criminalizing the behaviour or the individual" (UNODC, 2008).

In the international context, in recent years, more schools have launched and tested initiatives and projects aimed at promoting the restorative approach and restorative practices: (a) in terms of cultural and disciplinary policy of the entire school, supporting students, teachers, non-teaching staff with specific training; (b) as an approach capable of promoting and developing social and emotional skills (e.g., empathy, self-esteem, nonviolent communication, peaceful conflict management); (c) as practices specifically activated, with the involvement of external facilitators, to manage and respond to episodes of bullying, conflicts, inappropriate and/or offensive and/or violent behaviour. Figure 1 is an example of this. Therefore, involvement of the school community in the resolution of conflicts that may arise within the same is based on the idea that members of the community need and want to repair the harm suffered and/or acted upon and that they have the skills and opportunities to do it, promoting the development of creative resolution strategies, nonviolent communication, and non-judgmental listening. The starting point is that the promotion of the restorative approach to the whole school, through the activation of practices such as peer mediation, circle time, restorative conferencing, family group conferencing, community-building circles, can represent an approach aimed not only at repairing harm in case of

conflicts and/or incorrect behaviour, but which allows building and strengthening relationships, as well as promoting and developing relational and personal skills such as empathy, assertiveness, self-efficacy.

Figure 3. Restorative and relational process skills (Hopkins, 2002).



This review provided the empirical basis for the intervention carried out at school (see Chapter IV). It was carried out with the primary objective of identifying evidence-based best practices related to the implementation of restorative justice-based school programs and their practices. The restorative justice process at school, therefore, was based on the most up-to-date and valid scientific results present in the literature.

1.1. Systematic literature review

In recent years, the adoption of restorative justice and restorative practices in educational context has expanded significantly. Understanding the theoretical and research foundations of this topic is crucial for its effective implementation based on scientific knowledge. The aim of this article is to analyse the practices derived from restorative justice that have been implemented in schools and the outcomes achieved. By examining both qualitative and quantitative research in this field, a systematic review was conducted, focusing on studies from the past decade that utilized restorative justice and restorative practices at various levels of school education.

This review employed methods including the PRISMA guidelines, the PRISMA flow diagram, and qualitative synthesis. Scientific articles were selected for the literature review

based on the following criteria: (1) publication date between 2010 and 2021; (2) student population aged 6–18 years; (3) publications in English; (4) articles that were directly accessible or could be accessed by contacting the author(s). A total of 34 articles met these inclusion criteria. The most used restorative practices in schools are: circles (n=26), followed by restorative conferences (n=17), peer mediation (n=10), restorative conversations (n=8), mediation (n=7), and community-building circles (n=5). Restorative practices can enhance the school climate, discipline, and positive conflict management through actions aimed at preventing suspensions, exclusions, conflicts, and misbehaviours (e.g., bullying). Restorative justice practices promote positive relationships between peers and between students and teachers, as well as prosocial behaviours through the development of social and emotional skills. From the studies reviewed, there is significant interest in applying restorative justice and practices in educational settings. Discussions on the benefits and challenges of implementation were provided. However, there remains limited evidence of direct correlation, indicating the need for further research on the impact of restorative justice and restorative practices in schools.

1.1.1. Materials and methods

For the purposes of the systematic review of the literature, those studies that activated restorative justice interventions at school were taken into consideration. By interventions we mean activation of restorative practices, such as circles, conferences, mediation, peer mediation, restorative conversations, community-building circles, conducted by:

a) external experts, such as facilitators and/or a mediator;
b) teachers and students trained on the use of restorative practices;
c) researchers as experts in restorative practices.

A systematic review of the literature was conducted following the PRISMA guidelines (Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses) and the PRISMA flow diagram[18] adapted to the type of synthesis proposed by this review. Indeed, a qualitative summary and not a meta-analysis summary was performed in this review.
To answer the research questions, only articles that met this inclusion criteria were selected:

- Documents: scientific articles published in the selected databases;
- Population: age of 6–18 years, schools, males, females;
- Interventions: restorative justice and restorative practices;

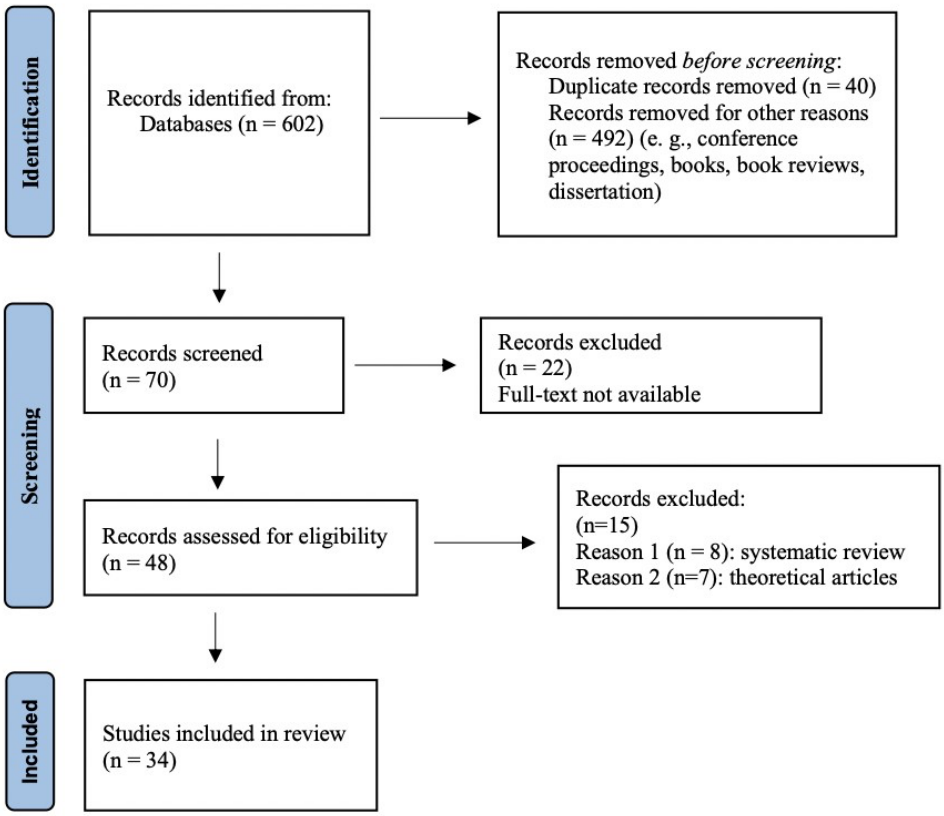
[18] http://www.prisma-statement.org

- Sources of information: databases (Web of Science, Science Direct, PubMed, APA PsycInfo, APA PsycArticles, Psychology & Behavioural Sciences Collection, Education Research Complete);
- Type of publications: full-text papers already published or accessible on request through contact with the authors;
- Language: English;
- Years of publication: 2010–2021.

Consequently, documents such as conference proceedings, books, book reviews, and dissertations were excluded.

The research was performed in the different selected databases (Web of Science, Science Direct, PubMed, APA PsycInfo, APA PsycArticles, Psychology & Behavioural Sciences Collection, Education Research Complete), limiting the search to the publications published in the years 2010–2021; 602 articles were found based on the search carried out with the keywords "school" and/or "restorative justice" and/or "restorative practices" and/or "children" and/or "adolescents". Figure 4 presents a PRISMA flow diagram of the article's selection process.

Figure 4. PRISMA flow diagram of the study selection process



For the scoring process, the PRISMA Checklist was used for the items to be included in the reporting of a systematic review. All the records were downloaded and inserted in an Excel file, indicating for each full-text availability/non-availability. The full-text articles were downloaded while the unavailable articles were requested from the authors (*n*=22).

All the 602 articles were subjected to the initial manual selection (title and abstract) with the involvement of two professional figures. The articles were further examined by two other professional figures: out of the 602 articles found, 40 duplicates were removed, and 492 were excluded (conference proceedings, books, book reviews, doctoral theses). There were 70 records evaluated for admissibility; of these, 21 records were excluded because full texts were not available: none of the requested articles were sent.

Additional 15 articles were excluded from the final analysis as they are systematic reviews and theoretical articles. As academic scientific literature on the topics covered by this review, these 15 articles are reported in Appendix 1 (Table A1) as a qualitative summary as a possible object of interest to the reader. There were two articles which the research team did not agree to include in the review, therefore an opinion was sought from an external expert with international experience on restorative justice: their answer was discussed by the entire research team, and finally two articles were included in the review.

Thirty-four articles were assessed as eligible and therefore included in the qualitative summary. A codebook was created for the 34 selected articles using Microsoft Excel v16.56 (21121100) and the IBM SPSS Statistics for Windows, Version 25.0. Armonk, NY: IBM Corp for graphs and percentages. The first version of the module was created of the selected articles (50%) and then verified (the remaining 50%) by two independent coders (Losito, 2002). Some categories of results were modified, separating and/or summarizing them (e.g., risky behaviours for health; promotion of well-being; interpersonal relationship improvement; disparities; safety; school climate; academic results; absenteeism). The two independent experts coded the articles according to the constructed categories. Only in five articles, there were different modes of interpretation by independent coders (only one category interpreted differently by coders for each article). The five articles were submitted to two other independent coders and subsequently to the research supervisor. The final discussion with the supervisor and research team resolved the doubts on these five articles.

1.1.2. Results

Thirty-four studies conducted in seven countries (USA, 23; UK, 4; Australia, 2; Canada, 2; Croatia, 1; Japan, 1; Scotland, 1) were included in this systematic review. Of these, six studies are randomized controlled trials (RCT) (Acosta et al., 2019; Bonell et al.,

2014; Bonell et al., 2017; Bonell et al., 2018; Green et al., 2019; Warren et al., 2019); one study is a follow-up survey (Ahmed & Braithwaite, 2012); one study is a correlational study (Anyon et al., 2016); one study is an interrupted time series (ITS) analysis (Hashim et al., 2018); two studies are nonexperimental design studies (Moir & MacLeod, 2018; Norris, 2019); one study is quasi-experimental pre–post design study (Wong et al., 2011); 17 studies are qualitative studies (in these, studies on individual cases were taken into consideration) (Farr et al., 2020; Gilzene, 2021; González et al., 2018; Gregory et al., 2015; Gregory et al., 2021; Gwathney, 2021; Ingraham et al., 2016; Kehoe et al., 2018; Kervick et al., 2020; Lustick et al., 2020; Parker & Bickmore, 2020; Reimer, 2020; Romano & Almengor, 2021; Sandwick et al., 2019; Vaandering, 2014b; Weaver & Swank, 2020; Wilson et al., 2020); one study is both literature review and a qualitative research study (Peuraˇca & Vejmelka, 2015); two studies are qualitative and quantitative studies (Skrzypek et al., 2020; Wang & Lee, 2018); two studies are quantitative studies (Payne & Welch, 2010; Todic et al., 2020).

The characteristics of the 34 included studies and the qualitative synthesis are reported in Appendix 2 (Table A2) following the PICOS scheme: participants, interventions, comparisons, outcomes, and study design.

Many studies (e.g. Bonell et al., 2018; Hashim et al., 2018; Kehoe et al., 2018; Sandwick et al., 2019; Wang & Lee, 2018) have promoted projects for the implementation of restorative justice and restorative practices in schools, which have included training courses on restorative justice and the use of its practices. The training of teachers, school staff, and students has made it possible to sensitize the entire school to the restorative approach; supporting openness to change in school policy and facilitating the application of the restorative approach to the whole school; transferring knowledge and skills; making students and teachers autonomous in the activation and management of restorative practices; develop skills to manage and deal with conflicts independently; enable students to become active members of school life and decision-making processes on issues that concern them. Lots of studies (e.g. Bonell et al., 2017; González et al., 2018; Lustick et al., 2020; Moir & MacLeod, 2018) involved external experts both to support students and/or teachers in managing practices and to act as facilitators. In some studies (e.g. Gwathney, 2021; Reimer, 2020; Romano & Almengor, 2021; Todic et al., 2020), restorative practices were provided directly by researchers acting as experts in restorative practices.

The people involved in the studies as the participants were students, teachers, principals, non-teaching staff, parents, for a total 22,383 participants from about 900 schools.

The definition of the school level involved in restorative justice intervention is not a consistent concept across different studies with different jurisdictions. However, we

summarised the school level in the following categories: primary school/elementary school (14.7%); middle school/secondary school (20.6%); high school (17.6%); elementary/primary, middle/secondary and high school (5.9); middle/secondary and high school (17.6%); primary/elementary school and middle/secondary school (17.6%); not available (5.9%). This result seems consistent with the age range of the students involved: 6–11 (11.8%), from 9–12 to 11–14 (35.3%), 14–18 (17.6%), 11–18 (17.6%), 5–18 (11.8%), not available (5.9%).

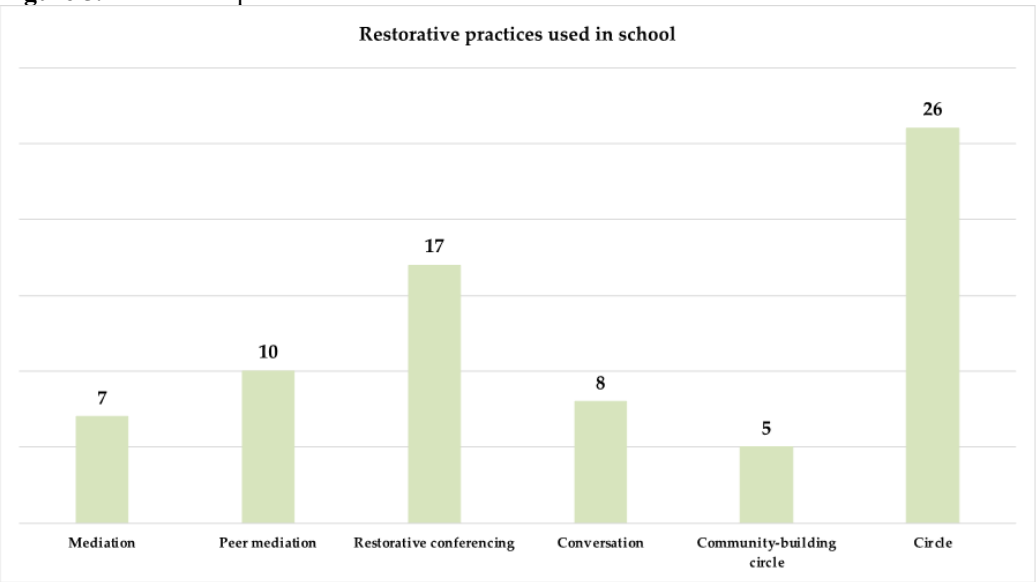
The studies included in this review dealt with analysing the impact at the individual and/or school level of the implementation of restorative justice and restorative practices, both as a whole school-oriented approach and as practices activated to respond to specific cases through comparison with the period prior to implementation or with schools that promote traditional and/or punitive school disciplinary policies (e.g., zero-tolerance policies); in particular, in 47.1% of the studies, the schools envisaged traditional disciplinary practices; in 20.6% of the studies, the schools had zero-tolerance policies; in 20.6% of the studies, the schools envisaged traditional disciplinary practices oriented towards punitive and exclusive approaches; in one study (2.9%), the comparison was made with the nonapplication of action groups formed in restorative justice; in 8.8% of the cases, it was not possible to identify the disciplinary approach prior to the study.

1.1.2.1. Restorative practices used in school

In all the 34 articles examined, it emerged that each school had activated and implemented at least one restorative practice both as daily educational practices that teachers can use in classrooms and as practices to manage, deal with, and respond to minor and/or moderate and/or serious gravity; harmful behaviours; violence; school crimes.

As you can see in Figure 5, the most used restorative practices were circles (n=26), followed by restorative conferences (n=17), peer mediation (n=10), restorative conversations (n=8), mediation (n=7) and community-building circles (n=5).

Figure 5. Restorative practices used in school



These practices, inserted within a project to implement the restorative approach across the whole school, can become practices inserted within the didactic school curriculum as they can lead to an increase in students' social skills (e.g., empathy, awareness, responsibility), foster ability to express and manage emotions, promote the development of fair and positive relationships. For example, several schools implemented community-building circles in classrooms. Therefore, community-building circles represent preventive methods that can be designed and activated to support students and teachers in developing strong and positive relationships between them: these circles allow creating a safe relational space in which students can tell their own stories of life and experiences, thus encouraging learning and mutual knowledge. Furthermore, in some schools, it is sometimes the students themselves who lead the circles rather than the teachers.

Restorative conversations were activated to discuss general life issues (e.g., politics, sports, etc.), issues concerning teaching and/or school in general, but also as moments of listening and preparation for students in view of a restorative process.

It emerged that many schools activated mediation with the support and guidance of qualified external staff (e.g., facilitators as a neutral third party) to address mostly serious conflicts between students. Peer mediation and restorative circles were activated to manage and respond to minor conflicts. About peer mediation, the literature underlines the importance of training students in this practice as it could represent a beneficial process for the whole school: through peer mediation, students can experiment using their conflict resolution skills, become able to independently manage problems, conflicts, differences, repair and build

relationships, and feel being an active part of the decision-making process by building shared solutions themselves and not letting the school solve problems for them.

Restorative circles and conferences can represent alternative approaches to managing student behaviour problems, creating a space for reflection and discussion to find alternative disciplinary responses to suspensions and exclusions. As with mediation, restorative conferences are mostly implemented as a response to serious conflicts, while restorative circles are mostly implemented in response to minor conflicts. Both practices, very often facilitated by external personnel, allow building listening moments and spaces in which to co-construct the assumption of responsibility, actions, constructive responses. Circles are mainly activated to address specific issues (e.g., racism and bullying in the classroom), while conferences are used to address more serious incidents (e.g., school offences, violence) involving all parties involved and/or affected by the harmful behaviour. Participants always include the victim, the offender and the facilitator, but also other members of the school community, such as students, families and, if and/or when necessary, external agencies.

Harm and support circles are activated to manage and respond to conflicts and/or other issues (e.g., absenteeism), involving both the interested parties and the key support stakeholders. These circles are generally managed by qualified personnel, in most cases by a facilitator.

Some schools, in parallel or within a restorative justice intervention, planned to include individual and group counselling moments. Sometimes, counselling represented a moment of tutoring between the school staff and the student, including in terms of activating a process to support students for school reintegration following a disciplinary measure of suspension or exclusion from the class.

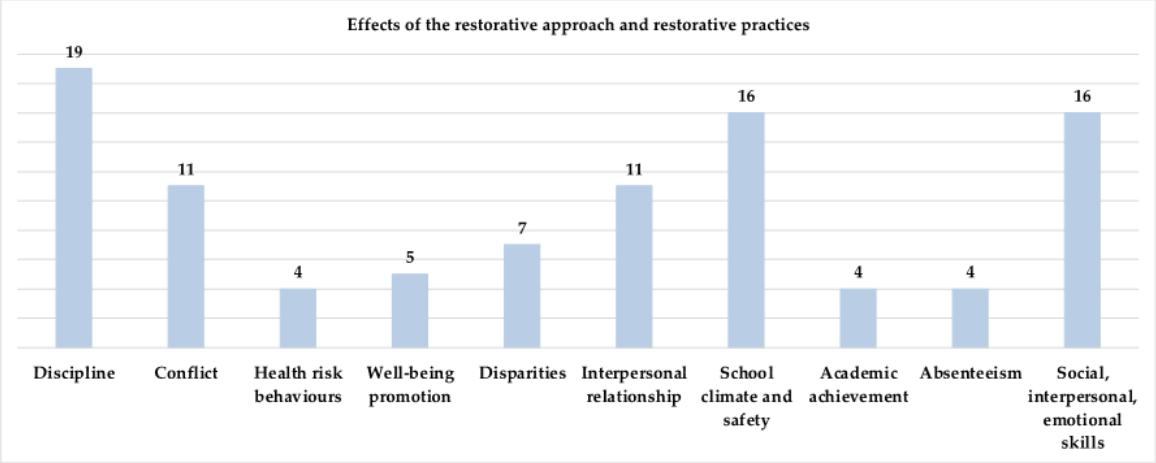
1.1.2.2. Effects of the restorative approach and restorative practices

Positive results emerged with respect to different aspects: school climate, discipline, positive conflict management through actions that aim at preventing suspensions, exclusions, conflicts, and misbehaviour (e.g., bullying); positive relationships between peers and between students and teachers; prosocial behaviours; social and emotional skills; school–community–family ties; well-being (through restorative culture as a whole-school approach).

The effects of the restorative approach and restorative practices most reported in the studies concern, as you can see in the Figure 6, discipline (19 studies); school climate and safety (n=17); social, interpersonal and emotional skills (n=16). The other results reported by the studies concern conflict (n=11), interpersonal relationship (n=16); disparities (n=8), well-

being promotion (n=5); health risk behaviours (n=4); academic achievement (n=4), absenteeism (n=4).

Figure 6. Effects of the restorative approach and restorative practices



Nineteen studies highlighted how participation in restorative interventions and/or programs can bring positive results in terms of greater ability to manage behavioural problems and school discipline, with greater adherence to the rules. In schools where the restorative approach (and practices) is adopted, less misconduct by students, reduction in injuries, disciplinary postponements, and school crimes are evident, with more positive behaviours and decreases in suspension rates and disciplinary sanctions. This leads to a reduction in the need for punitive measures (Anyon et al., 2016; Bonell et al., 2014; 2017; 2018; Gilzene, 2021; Gregory et al., 2015; 2021; Green et al., 2019; Gwathney, 2021; Hashim et al., 2018; Ingraham et al., 2016; Kehoe et al., 2018; Payne, 2010; Reimer, 2020; Sandwick et al., 2019; Weaver & Swank, 2020; Wang & Lee, 2018; Wong et al., 2011). For example, the study by Payne et al. (2010) pointed out that the use of severe punishment increases the likelihood of choosing punitive/zero-tolerance policies to manage and respond to student behaviour problems; the use of milder punishments increases the likelihood of resorting to restorative practices; the use of harsh punishments is unrelated to the level of crime and delinquency. According to four of these 19 studies mentioned, a whole school-oriented restorative approach leads to the development of alternative methods to punitive and exclusionary discipline and/or sometimes using both punitive and restorative disciplinary responses, also showing a reduction in the use of disciplinary sanctions, such as suspensions and expulsions and/or fairer disciplinary practices (Gregory et al., 2015; 2021; Green et al., 2019; Wong et al., 2011).

Some restorative justice programs and interventions are activated in school settings to prevent, manage, and contain bullying and/or other violence. Eight studies highlighted the reduction in the experiences of aggression, violence, and bullying in the schools that had

adopted the restorative approach and restorative practices compared to the schools that used the traditional disciplinary systems and/or zero-tolerance policies (Bonell et al., 2014; 2017; 2018; Green et al., 2019; Ingraham et al., 2016; Kehoe et al., 2018; Wong et al., 2011). There was a reduction in bullying-related behaviours and more reports. In this respect, the collaboration of the principals and the entire teaching staff with the students and families in the management and resolution of such behaviours is fundamental (Wong et al., 2011). Four studies highlighted that the use of restorative practices helps to reduce victimization of bullying and cyberbullying (Acosta et al., 2019; Bonell et al., 2014; 2017; 2018). Fewer cases of violent behaviour, aggression, violence, and bullying, fewer victimization situations, and, more generally, fewer school crimes lead to a reduction in costs for society compared, for example, to health services and costs related to the justice system (Bonell et al., 2014; 2017; 2018).

Five studies highlighted how zero-tolerance policies exacerbate inequalities in disciplinary treatment between White students and students of a different ethnicity, class, gender, and socioeconomic status; on the contrary, the restorative approach can favour the reduction in the inequality of treatment (Anyon et al., 2016; Green et al., 2019; Hashim et al., 2019; Gregory et al., 2015; Gwathney, 2021). Anyon et al. (2016), while highlighting the positive results of the implementation of restorative practices on disparity, underlined the importance of investing additional resources to ensure that the restorative approach is increasingly promoted in schools, especially oriented throughout the whole school, as there is always a tendency towards unequal treatment in school discipline. Gregory et al. (2015) reported that Black students are more likely to be punished, e.g., with suspensions and exclusions, for early misconduct than White students. According to the analysis by Hashim et al. (2019), programs of restorative assistance are shown to have considerable suspension rates of students, without rates (Blacks, Latinos, Asians, Whites, low socioeconomic status).

The restorative approach applied to the school context can be effective in the face of various types of difficulties, including conflicts (between students, between students and teachers, between teachers and parents, between managers and teachers, etc.). The restorative approach and practices represent a working methodology for the resolution of the different conflicts that may emerge as well.

Indeed, 11 studies show that the application of restorative practices and, more generally, of the restorative approach to the whole school, favours the development of alternative practices, strategies, and methods of conflict management and resolution (Ahmed & Braithwaite, 2012; Gregory et al., 2015; Green et al., 2019; González et al., 2018; Hashim et al., 2018; Ingraham et al., 2016; Parker & Bickmore, 2020; Peuraˇca & Vejmelka, 2015;

Reimer, 2020; Sandwick et al., 2019; Skrzypek et al., 2020). Therefore, according to these studies, an increased proactive conflict management capability emerges, a high level of success of restorative practices in conflict resolution, development of nonviolent conflict resolution strategies, nonviolent problem-solving strategies, and development of skills for peaceful conflict resolution. In these programs, it is very often school staff, sometimes even with the help of external facilitators, who engage students in using restorative practices to resolve, manage, and respond to peer members without using punitive practices; re-establish the rules violated by the behaviour; repair harm; encourage the re-entry into the school for students who have been suspended and/or expelled; teaching students to resolve their conflicts on their own in a peaceful way; promote the ability to identify needs and actions useful to repair the relationship and/or harm between all the parties involved. Among these 11 studies, only from the study of Gregory (2015) it emerged that restorative practices are also used in schools to resolve and manage conflicts between school staff members. As pointed out by Peurača and Vejmelka (2015), sometimes, conflicts are an integral part of community life, such as school, and can represent valid opportunities for growth, but very often the inability to manage and face them or manage them and deal with them with punitive practices, leads to opposite effect. On the other hand, it is fundamental to promote alternative and nonviolent methods that can favour the possibility for people to confront each other with respect to different opinions, beliefs, and values as well as have greater awareness of the situation and work together to find solutions. Restorative processes can be a nonviolent response: they help to prevent and reduce conflicts and resolve them peacefully. González et al. (2018) and Reimer (2020) explored the association between restorative justice and student well-being, and as regards the perception of students about conflicts, the restorative approach implemented at school allowed students to reread conflict as a normal and natural aspect in relationships if it is addressed and managed as a moment of mutual growth. Therefore, students reported that conflict management-oriented restorative practices allowed the school community to work together in a proactive, constructive, and respectful way, exposing various problems and finding together strategies and solutions to solve them: the restorative approach and practices can promote participatory and co-creative decision-making processes between students and school staff. Of the 11 studies, five studies found that student engagement by teachers in conflict resolution or respect issues that deal with conflicting topics and/or experiences promotes dialogue and reflection on how to resolve them in a different and peaceful way, bringing out a greater capacity for proactive management. The importance of promoting proactive practices that are used in everyday life, both in the classroom and at school, is highlighted to foster positive relationships and

prevent the onset of conflicts (Green et al., 2019; Parker & Bickmore, 2020; Reimer, 2020; Sandwick et al., 2019; Skrzypek et al., 2020). Furthermore, Sandwick et al. (2019) spoke of the restorative approach in terms of a "holistic framework" since, precisely because of its transversality, it does not promote the building of relationships and the resolution of conflicts only when disciplinary incidents occur but is perfectly integrated into the functioning of the school.

Four studies (Bonell et al., 2014; 2017; 2018; Warren et al., 2019) highlighted the effects of restorative justice and restorative practices on health risk. It emerged that the use of the restorative approach at school reduces the likelihood of students engaging in harmful behaviours for health such as the use of substances, alcohol and drugs, smoking, and dangerous sexual intercourse. For example, the three studies by Bonell et al. (2014; 2017; 2018) showed that restorative interventions had a greater effect in boys than in girls with respect to the quality of life, psychological problems, well-being, smoking and alcohol, bullying, contacts with the police. Furthermore, the proposed interventions were more effective with students who had had different bullying experiences, significant effects on psychological difficulties, quality of life, and well-being, and with students with greater aggression, with significant effects on the quality of life, psychosocial problems, well-being, and some risk behaviours (smoking, alcohol). Even Warren et al. (2019) showed greater efficacy of intervention in males than in females with respect to the reduction in health risk behaviours, such as smoking, drugs, alcohol, fewer contacts with the police for risky behaviours, and with the health system, in their study. Some studies tried to analyse the possible relationship between the use of the restorative approach at school and the improvement of well-being.

Five studies (Kehoe et al., 2018; Norris, 2019; Reimer, 2020; Todic et al., 2020; Warren et al., 2019) investigated the impact of restorative justice and restorative practices on well-being. The research by Norris (2019) focused on evaluating the impact of the restorative approach on two areas of psychological well-being, happiness, and school commitment. The authors stressed, on the one hand, the potential of the restorative approach in positively influencing the outcomes, finding higher levels of happiness and scholastic commitment in schools that have implemented the restorative approach to the whole school; on the other hand, the author highlighted the lack of empirical evidence to support this thesis, especially with respect to the positive influence of restorative programs on happiness: it is not clear which restorative practices are responsible for this positive influence. Reimer [46] suggests that the restorative approach and practices, aiming to build solid, positive, lasting, and quality relationships, helped students to give and understand the meaning of their daily

existence, generating and promoting feelings and perceptions of individual and collective well-being. Even Warren et al. (2019) showed positive outcomes of the restorative justice approach in greater mental well-being, better psychological functioning, and quality of life, with an increase in health and well-being throughout the school in their study. Furthermore, from the study by Todic et al. (2020), it appears that in schools that have implemented restorative justice, students are less likely to be absent from school due to health problems and, according to Kehoe et al. (2018), there is also a decrease in the rates of anxiety and depression.

Sixteen studies showed how the restorative approach can promote positive interactions between and with all its components. A better student experience both in the classroom and at school linked to improved relationships between peers, between students and teachers, referring to the students' experience of their teachers as respectful, and between school and families, building mutual trust and growth, emerged (Acosta et al., 2019; Ahmed & Braithwaite, 2012; Bonell 2014; 2015; 2017; González et al., 2018; Gregory et al., 2015; 2021; Ingraham et al., 2016; Kehoe et al., 2018; Kervick et al., 2020; Peuraˇca & Vejmelka, 2015; Sandwick et al., 2019; Skrzypek et al., 2020; Weaver & Swank, 2020; Warren et al., 2019). Ingraham et al. (2016) stressed the importance of using active, collaborative, and relationship-oriented methods of participation that involve teachers, parents, and students. The two studies by Gregory et al. (2015; 2021) highlighted a greater positive relationship between students and teachers following the high level of implementation of restorative practices by teachers, also affecting the relationship with students of different ethnicities, lowering the level of inequality and promoting equity and social justice, as well as raising the level of perception of teachers as more respectful. This led to reduce the level of unequal disciplinary treatment in terms of fewer postponements and exclusions. The study by Sandwick et al. (2019) highlighted that the implementation of the restorative justice approach and restorative practices enable students, and parents to consider school staff (teaching and non-teaching) available, supportive, and attentive. The key method for building the relationship between students and teachers was to promote moments of confrontation and personal support and study between them, allowing a flexible and informal development space and favouring opportunities for questions, even the ones far from academic. Another key method highlighted was mentoring for students by all stakeholders who are in contact with the students (teachers, guidance counsellors, social workers). This has made it possible to create and cultivate solid positive relationships, greater trust, and more familiarity, thus facilitating communication and communication of possible problems and conflicts.

Eight studies (González et al., 2018; Gregory et al., 2015; Green et al., 2019; Gwathney et al., 2021; Ingraham et al., 2016; Lustick et al., 2020; Romano & Almengor, 2021; Weaver et al., 2020) highlighted how restorative practices and even more the restorative approach to the whole school, by building positive interpersonal relationships, can contribute to lowering the level of racial, cultural, gender, and socioeconomic status inequality and exclusion, facilitating positive relationships between students and between students and teachers regardless of the "diversity of the other". Therefore, from these studies, it emerged that implementation of the restorative approach to the whole school promotes school connection by supporting the development of fair, solid, and trusting relationships and development of the ability to recognize the experience and reality of marginalized student groups: this represents an important protective factor for the most vulnerable, rejected, excluded, marginalized students. In addition, it emerged that restorative justice interventions can improve relations between the Whites and the Blacks and, consequently, represent an important tool for addressing racial disparity through the development of reflexivity and critical conversations about race as, according to the authors, the Whites and the Blacks differ in the perception of racial discrimination.

The restorative approach is one of the tools that can be considered and used by school staff to encourage the development and promotion of a positive school climate. Indeed, in 17 studies (e.g., Green et al., 2009; González et al., 2018; Moir & MacLeod, 2018; Norris, 2019), significant changes in school climate and school safety emerged in schools that promoted the restorative approach. These studies found that in schools that promote restorative practices and, even more so, restorative justice as a school policy, there is a perception by teachers and students of a better school climate and an equitable environment, safe, supportive, inclusive and, more generally, of an improved school environment (Gregory et al., 2015; Gwathney, 2021; Kehoe et al., 2021; Kervick et al., 2020; Parker & Bickmore, 2020). The study by Sandwick et al. (2019) showed an increase in the sense of academic value and community support. The study by Reimer (2020), exploring the role of restorative justice in facilitating student well-being, highlighted that restorative justice policies and practices implemented in schools had supported and facilitated students to build a strong sense of individual and collective coherence within the school. Therefore, the author stressed that the restorative practices implemented in the school made it possible to create a place where students could "connect with each other", facilitating and promoting creation of a strong sense of school community. In this sense, the students felt like active members of the community, especially with respect to the decision-making processes of the school. According to Acosta et al. (2019), implementation of the restorative approach, while

not causing significant improvements in the school climate, results in the students who have had the opportunity to experience the restorative practices implemented by the school/teachers reporting a significantly higher degree of school connection compared to when these practices are not implemented. González et al. (2018) found that implementation of the restorative approach to the whole school helps to develop non-hierarchical leadership and promote proactive and co-creative decision-making processes between all school members, strengthening and promoting a strong sense of membership. Ingraham et al. (2016), promoting the restorative justice approach and practices as a disciplinary model in school, underlined the importance of using methods and practices of multicultural interviews and collaboration to foster a positive school climate, but also to promote the restorative approach within domestic contexts, contributing to promoting a sense of belonging and a culture of care. One other study, not included in the previous ones, in particular, the study by Farr et al. (2020) highlighted that to ensure creation of a positive and safe school climate through the restorative approach, the following is essential: openness and readiness for change of the whole school body; collegial support among the staff; strong, shared, and non-hierarchical leadership; work together with teachers and families, strengthening the school–community–family ties.

Four studies (González et al., 2018; Todic et al., 2020; Warren et al., 2019; Weaver & Swank, 2020) showed positive results in schools that had implemented the restorative approach and practices with respect to academic outcomes. Consequently, it emerged that higher school performance can contribute to lowering levels of school absenteeism. Restorative practices as an alternative school disciplinary model can also lead to positive results with respect to academic outcomes with higher student engagement in education, supporting educational approaches to improve school performance, and absenteeism at school. Indeed, the studies showed improvements in academic achievement and lower levels of student absenteeism, although there is still limited and conflicting evidence. According to Weaver and Swank (2020), the increase in academic achievement in classes that implement restorative justice could be because in those classes, the teachers, through restorative justice, are able to create an equitable, safe, inclusive classroom climate which allows, consequently, the students to express themselves, engage, and confront each other and the teachers themselves.

Sixteen studies highlighted that the restorative approach and restorative practices can also have positive results in the promotion and development of assertive skills, problem solving, emotional awareness, prosocial behaviours, and, more generally, of social and interpersonal skills. The use of restorative practices in schools promotes the construction of

empathy as students can express their emotions, listen, and understand the emotions of others, reflect on their feelings, thoughts, and actions, both past and future, developing such skills as reflective thinking and the ability to take responsibility for one's own behaviour. Therefore, these studies highlighted how this approach can favour the development of social, interpersonal, and emotional skills (e.g., self-efficacy, empathy, problem solving, awareness, and accountability), perspective-taking, self-awareness, communication skills through participation in dialogue (Kervick et al., 2020; Lustick et al., 2020; Peuraˇca & Vejmelka, 2015; Skrzypek et al., 2020; Weaver & Swank, 2020; Wilson et al., 2020). Furthermore, from the study by Ahmed & Braithwaite (2012), it emerged that restorative justice and practices, when applied to bullying situations, can lead to the development of shame management skills. Bonell et al. (2014; 2017; 2018) promoted teaching training on restorative practices, relationships, and social and emotional skills. It emerged that participation in these trainings led to an improvement of social, interpersonal, and emotional skills (e.g., self-efficacy, empathy, awareness, assertiveness, accountability). These trainings, divided into modules, were then provided to a school so that it could continue the work itself and include these modules within the school program, given the positive results that emerged. The study by González et al. (2018) found that the whole-school restorative approach creates opportunities to increase communication and develop and improve human agency and resilience, socioemotional listening, leadership and professional skills. From the study by Ingraham et al. (2016), it emerged that the restorative justice approach and practices as a disciplinary model promoted in school favour the learning of listening skills, communication, empathy, and assertive skills, underlining how this learning can also bring benefits in other contexts and in relationships with other people, such as teachers and parents. Wong et al. (2011) and Kehoe et al. (2018), examining the impact of restorative practices at school, found that the implementation of and experimentation with restorative justice allowed the development of social skills such as harmony, empathy, awareness and responsibility, respect-oriented relationships, reflective thinking. Finally, from the study by Parker et al. (2020), it emerged that teachers' implementation of dialogue-oriented restorative practices enabled them to teach skills for active listening, empathy, perspective-taking, and self-awareness.

1.1.3. Discussion

The purpose of this article was to analyse which restorative justice practices have been implemented at school and what kind of results have been achieved, starting from the analysis of the qualitative and quantitative research in the field. It emerged that the most

used restorative practices concern the involvement of more people (circles and restorative conferences) rather than simply involvement of the victim and the perpetrator of a harmful behaviour, confirming a broader, more systemic, and relational approach to restorative justice. Some schools have promoted the implementation of restorative justice school-oriented approach to change the school and the disciplinary policy that had characterized the schools up to that time, such as traditional approaches and zero-tolerance policies. In this sense, several reflections on punitive and exclusionary school disciplinary policies have emerged, defining them as a matter of health justice and underlining the importance of implementing alternative disciplinary practices, such as restorative justice practices. Traditional approaches and/or zero-tolerance policies very often exaggerate the inequalities of treatment of students of different races, gender, socioeconomic status and increase the likelihood of recurrence of deviant behaviours and criminal behaviours, as well as school dropout. These modalities involve actions of exclusion that lead to stigmatization even more, distancing, and isolation of young people from the school context and from people in general, increasing fragility and vulnerability even more.

Very often, some schools have activated restorative justice practices, including via involvement of external experts, to respond to cases of serious conflict and violence, as well as in cases of bullying, as restorative practices promote active involvement in the processes of solving a bully/victim problem (Rigby, 2014). Sometimes, conflicts are an integral part of community life, such as school, and can represent valid opportunities for growth, but very often the inability to manage and face them or manage them and deal with them with punitive practices leads to an opposite effect. However, it is fundamental to promote alternative and nonviolent methods that can favour the possibility for people to confront each other with respect to different opinions, beliefs, and values as well as have greater awareness of the situation and work together to find solutions. Restorative processes can be a nonviolent response: they help to prevent and reduce conflicts and resolve them peacefully (Stewart Kline, 2016). The potential of interventions and/or restorative programs was highlighted with respect to a greater ability to manage and respond to behavioural problems. Therefore, schools that implement the restorative approach and practices achieve improvements in school discipline, reduction in injuries, disciplinary postponements, and school offenses. Consequently, there are greater positive behaviours and lower suspension rates and disciplinary sanctions, less need for punitive measures. Indeed, interventions and restorative justice projects at the whole school lead to the promotion of alternative and multilevel methods of managing behavioural problems (Mayworm et al., 2016).

In line with the scientific literature on the subject, restorative practices not only represent alternative practices to managing and responding to incorrect and violent behaviours (e.g., bullying and school crimes), but also significant spaces and opportunities to tell one's opinions and emotions, lower the level of disciplinary disparity between students of different races, cultures, and gender, proactively participate in decision-making processes. In addition, some studies showed better academic performance, resulting in lower levels of absenteeism. In this sense, in line with the academic scientific literature, in schools that have implemented restorative justice and restorative practices, there is a slight increase in the average grade, an increase in graduation rates, and a more than double decrease in dropout rates (Darling-Hammond et al., 2020). Therefore, the implementation of the restorative approach and restorative practices is expressed not only as a response to conflict, but in a preventive key to welcome and care for people, relationships, communities.

Furthermore, the restorative approach allows promoting prosocial behaviours through the development of social and emotional skills (e.g., responsibility), listening skills, and peaceful conflict resolution, positive interpersonal relationships, and trust, greater collaboration between school, police, justice system, families. This approach, by changing the entire school environment, could be one of the most effective and efficient ways to build safe, equitable, and inclusive school communities that promote empowerment, well-being, and better quality of life of all members. In addition, the restorative approach can contribute to a significant reduction in school exclusion and inequalities of gender, race, and socioeconomic status (Oxley & Holden, 2021). In this perspective, a more general focus can be found in the use of the restorative approach for the management and promotion of interpersonal relationships: positive relationships in the school context (with parents, teachers, peers) are associated with positive outcomes in many spheres of children's and adolescents' individual and educational development, affecting school engagement, achievement, and well-being (Boerchi et al., 2021). Scientific research on youth well-being adopts perspectives that aim at improving the quality of life of people, with a specific focus on those protective factors at an individual and contextual level (for example, positive school adaptation) that can promote well-being and/or favour factors and behaviours harmful to health (Lodi et al., 2019; Magnano et al., 2020). It is also a social level issue "since understanding adolescents' needs related to mental health is a basilar issue to let young people not only to fulfil their potential but also to contribute to the development of our communities" (Lodi et al., 2019, p. 125). For this reason, the effects of restorative justice and restorative practices on the management and containment of health risk behaviours should also be emphasized. Therefore, it was found that the use of the restorative approach

at school reduces the likelihood of students engaging in harmful behaviours for health such as the use of substances, such as alcohol and drugs, smoking, and dangerous sexual relations.

The possibility of activating training courses for restorative justice and its practices represents an important opportunity to obtain long-term benefits as it allows sensitizing the entire school to the restorative approach, supporting the openness to change of the school policy, transferring knowledge and skills, making students and teachers independent in the activation and management of restorative practices. In fact, in 26 schools, within the implementation projects of restorative justice and restorative practices at school, awareness-raising training courses were provided for students, teachers, school staff and specific in-depth courses for some staff members for timely conflict management. In 20 of these 26 studies, the involvement of external restorative justice professionals, such as facilitators, psychologists, social workers, emerged both for the intervention in cases of bullying, conflicts of medium/serious gravity, other harmful behaviours, and to support teachers and/or students in the activation and management of restorative practices. Sometimes, restorative practices were provided directly by the researchers as experts in restorative practices (n=8).

Training students in restorative practices allows them to develop skills to manage and deal with conflicts independently, making them active members of school life and decision-making processes on issues that affect them and makes it possible to promote and develop openness to change in school policies, thus facilitating the application of the restorative approach to the whole school. Conversely, schools that did not provide specific training encountered many difficulties in implementing the restorative approach within the school due to a lack of knowledge of the approach and practices. This underlines the importance of adequate training and support to help teachers, principals, students to gain confidence and become capable in using restorative justice and its practices and implement the restorative approach as a school policy.

In addition, complexity has emerged in implementation of the restorative approach and restorative practices at school. First, not all schools are ready and willing to change disciplinary and school policies, and not all schools believe this is possible. In addition, the complexity of implementing restorative justice may be underestimated: it is essential to carry out a careful assessment of the needs and contextual characteristics of the school/community in advance to assess the effective possibility of implementing restorative justice and practices. Although it is essential to establish qualitative models and evaluation systems with respect to the application of these practices, it is not always possible (if ever possible) to

apply a standard and unambiguous model. Difficulties have emerged in implementing restorative justice as an alternative disciplinary strategy if one chooses to integrate it into the school without taking action to eliminate one system over the other. Furthermore, it is essential to customize the programs and procedures through a context analysis that identifies the strengths and possible areas to be exploited, starting with small changes up to extending the intervention to the whole school through an action plan shared by the whole school community.

From the studies examined, results of great interest emerged regarding the benefits of applying restorative justice and practices in schools, as also confirmed by the theoretical articles and reviews reported in the Appendix 1 (Table A1). However, there is still limited evidence in terms of direct correlation, which suggests further studies.

2. Concluding thoughts, limitations and future implications

This review was conducted following the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA) guidelines. The methodological rigour that was attempted to be followed made it possible to provide an overview of the use of the restorative approach and practices in schools and, at the same time, to highlight their benefits. Restorative justice and restorative practices, as well as the restorative approach school-oriented disciplinary approach, provides a framework for prevention and intervention with respect to different aspects of school community life. The scientific literature on the subject underlines the importance of regularly evaluating the context and the availability of resources to strategically implement restorative justice programs and interventions in schools, especially in cases where the goal is to promote the restorative approach to the whole school as an alternative to traditional disciplinary policies and/or zero tolerance. It is essential to train all members of the school in restorative justice and practices, as well as a common and shared line among all members of the school community, also including families and external stakeholders who in various capacities work and/or collaborate with schools.

Although this review indicates positive outcomes for schools, teachers, students, and the school community at large, the criteria for the realization and implementation of the restorative approach and restorative practices in schools are changeable. For this reason, a systematic examination would allow, on the one hand, understanding more clearly the impact of restorative justice and practices in favouring the expected outcomes and, on the other hand, supporting schools in selecting and implementing effective projects and interventions to the objectives that they set themselves to ensure a positive, safe, respectful,

fair, supportive, inclusive, well-being-oriented educational context. Furthermore, a qualitative summary, and not a meta-analysis summary, was performed in this review. Therefore, it should be emphasized that since this is a review of the literature, a systematic review including meta-analyses would certainly be necessary: this would allow detecting an exhaustive systematic search framework of the available evidence on the benefits and effectiveness of using restorative justice and restorative practices at every level of school education.

Finally, further research in this field could focus on the specific challenges that school communities are facing today, considering the increase in polarisation and hatred, conflicts between young people, teachers, parents and administrative staff. Given this experience common to all schools, further research could focus on samples of schools that adopt traditional methods or the restorative approach in their school culture, to assess potential differences in how members of these communities react to and experience the situation.

3. Restorative justice and restorative practices in prison

Restorative justice is an approach aimed at peaceful conflict management, restoration of the value of justice and accountability among individuals and in communities, through dialogue, respect and solidarity among all persons involved (EFRJ, 2018, p. 3).

Today, public policies are questioning the need to promote and experiment new actions/interventions that can better foster the promotion of wellbeing and the optimal functioning of individuals, communities, organizations, and institutions, as well as improve the lives of all people and the safety of the places where people live, work, and operate (Read and Straker, 2019). Also by virtue of the goals of the 2030 Agenda, which aim to combat the phenomena of social exclusion and marginality, fight inequalities and build peaceful societies that respect human rights, the attention of public policies is also directed to the experimentation and promotion of new forms of local welfare in the areas of: peaceful management of conflicts; protection and listening to the victim, also with respect to the risks of secondary victimization; active reintegration of offenders; promotion of opportunities for participatory democracy as a means of involving people and systems in the prevention of deviance, crime, recidivism; conflict situations within organizations; promotion of individual and collective well-being.

Many restorative justice experts and researchers agree that restorative justice can be defined as a theoretical approach comparable to a socio-political movement that aims to change/transform the current justice systems. In fact, it is proposed as an approach capable of reducing the punitive and exclusionary nature of the current penal measures (Johnstone,

2014; Patrizi, 2024; UNODC, 2008; Zehr & Mika, 1998), which see the objective of the re-educative function of punishment as a failure. In fact, current prison systems use punitive practices to control, manage and respond to the misbehaviour of people detained in prison, very often exacerbating disciplinary problems rather than containing them. In addition, each prisoner follows a treatment programmed with the aim of being 're-educated', made more responsible and no longer adhering to the deviant/criminal code of conduct with a view to re-entering society. However, research shows that prison (and punishment), instead of being (re)educational, is very often ineffective (both in deterring crime and in preparing people for life after release), inhumane, stigmatizing and characterized by violence and conflict (e.g., between prisoners and between prisoners and staff, such as prison officers) (Johnstone, 2014). Therefore, there is a need to review current prison systems and make practices within them more constructive and meaningful, as well as to make prison a safe place to live and work. The restorative approach and its practices could be a viable alternative to the practices currently used in prisons, where the focus is both on repairing the harm caused by the offence and rebuilding relationships through the involvement of victims, offenders, and the community (Carroll & Warner, 2014; Johnstone, 2014; Patrizi, 2024; Wacquant, 2014; Wood, 2015), and on new ways of addressing/managing/responding to the different conflicts that may occur within prison.

Based on existing research studies in literature, the aim of this systematic review was to highlight which restorative practices are implemented in prisons and the results achieved, analysing its effects in terms of its advantages, criticalities, and challenges.

3.1. Systematic literature review

In recent years there has been a significant growth in the application of restorative justice and restorative practices also within prisons, both in terms of restorative practices activated to involve prisoners, victims, prison staff (educators, police officers, directors) and institutions, and as a possible prison disciplinary policy. In fact, while many researchers support the idea of restorative justice as a possible alternative to imprisonment (EFRJ, 2020; Garcia et al., 2020; Johnstone, 2014; Płatek, 2007; Ross & Muro, 2020; Ruggiero, 2011; Van Ness, 2007; Van Ness, 2014), there is an awareness that for some offenders a restraining response (e.g., detention) is necessary. Therefore, if incarceration is sometimes an appropriate and fundamental sanction, restorative justice and restorative practices will have to enter prisons so that this possibility can also be offered to detained offenders and, if possible, to victims and society (Dhami et al., 2009; Edgar & Newell, 2006; Garcia et al.,

2020; Johnstone, 2014; Ross & Muro, 2020; Van Ness, 2007; Zehr, 2005), in combination, for instance, with treatment programmes.

The development of restorative justice and restorative practices as a prison-wide approach, i.e. as a prison disciplinary policy, allows restorative justice processes to be used not only to promote the repair of the harm caused by the offence for which the prisoner is in prison, but also to manage and respond to different conflicts/problems (between prisoners, between prisoners and prison officers, between prisoners and educators, etc.). Therefore, the restorative approach and practices can facilitate collaborative and cooperative decision-making processes with respect to what is right to do to restore harm, resolve conflict and heal a wounded relationship, thus helping to build a fair, safe, supportive, and inclusive prison environment and, at the same time, to promote and develop interpersonal and individual skills such as empathy, self-efficacy, and non-violent communication.

3.1.1. Materials and methods

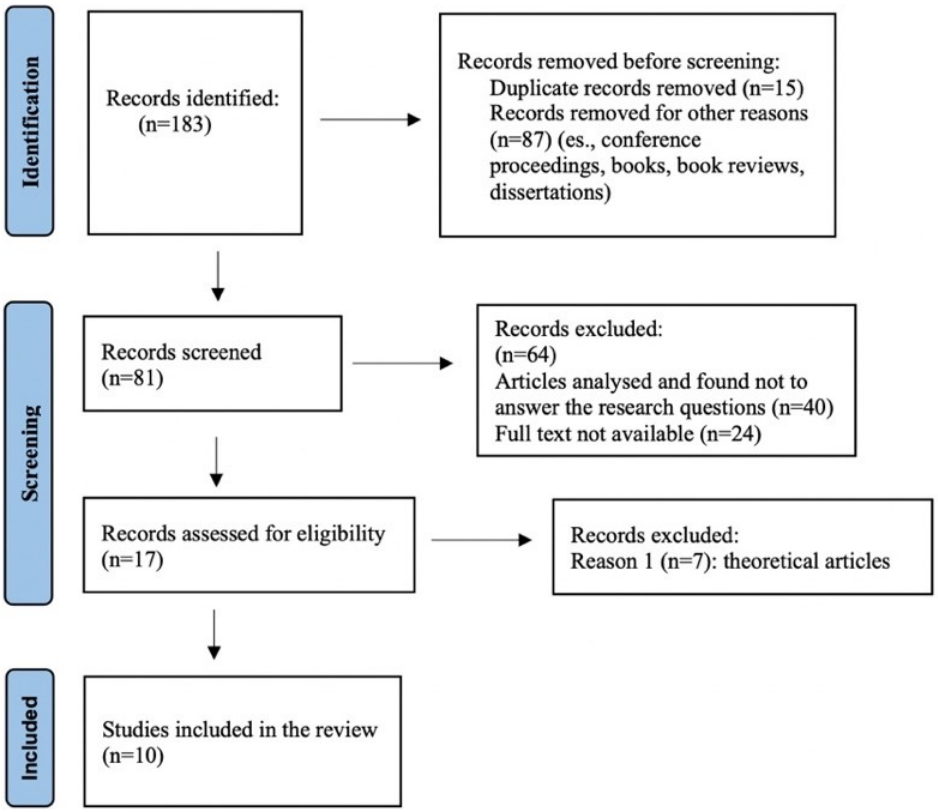
For the aims of this study, studies that have activated restorative justice processes within prisons for adults and/or minors have been taken into consideration.

This systematic literature review was conducted between May 2022 and May 2023 and the scientific articles included were selected based on the following inclusion criteria:

- years of publication between 2010-2023;
- target: adult and/or juvenile prisons;
- interventions: restorative justice's practices;
- English language literature;
- full-texts publications directly accessible from the scientific databases or by request to the author(s).

The research was done in line with the PRISMA guidelines, checklist, and the flow chart (http://www.prisma-statement.org accessed on: 04/06/2023). 233 articles were found based on the search carried out with the keywords: "restorative justice" and/or "restorative practices" and/or "prison" and/or "detention" and/or "correctional". The figure 7 presents a PRISMA flow diagram of the article's selection process.

Figure 7. Study selection process by PRISMA flow diagram



As can be seen from the figure above (Fig. 8), of the 233 articles found 25 were excluded because they were duplicates and 117 because they were books, book reviews, conference proceedings and doctoral dissertations. There were 91 articles evaluated as eligible: of these, 26 were excluded because full texts were not available (none of the 26 required articles were submitted) and 47 did not answer the research questions. 18 articles were evaluated as eligible but in the end 7 articles were excluded because they were a theoretical article. These 7 articles are reported in Appendix 3 (Table A3) as a possible subject of the reader(s) to be interested in. Therefore, at the end of the selection process, 11 articles were evaluated as suitable and thus included in this systematic review. To proceed with the content analysis of the articles, a codebook was developed, and the qualitative data analysis was subsequently conducted using SPSS 25.0 software. The codebook was set up on 50% of the selected records and then verified on the remaining 50% (Losito, 2002).

Two experts coded the studies according to the response categories created. In two records, discrepancies emerged in the interpretation of the data, which were then submitted to two other external coders and the supervisor. Two independent experts coded the articles according to the constructed categories. In 2 articles were their different modes of interpretation by independent coders (only one category interpreted differently by coders for

each article). The 2 articles were submitted to 2 other independent coders and subsequently to the research supervisor. A final discussion with the supervisor and research team resolved the doubts on these 4 articles.

3.1.2. Results

The studies included in this systematic review were conducted in five countries (USA, 5; UK, 3; Canada, 1; Brazil, 1; Israeli, 1) and all studies concern correctional institutions with adult prisoners. One study is multimethod research (Armour & Sliva, 2018); five studies are qualitative studies (Bohmert et al., 2018; Calkin, 2021; Gavrielides, 2014; Nowotny, 2018; Walker & Greening, 2010); three studies are randomized controlled trials (RCT) (Duwe, 2013; Duwe, 2018; Weimann-Saks & Peleg-Koriat, 2020), in which one (Duwe, 2018) is an update of the original protocol (Duwe, 2013); one study is quantitative studies (Stewart et al., 2018); one study used mixed methods (interviews and case studies) (D'Souza & Shapland, 2023).

The characteristics of the 11 included studies and the qualitative synthesis are reported in Appendix 4 (Table A4) following the PICOS scheme: participants, interventions, comparisons, outcomes, and study design.

None of the studies planned to train the participants involved in Restorative Justice and its practices, either in terms of raising awareness or in terms of training people so that they could directly activate and facilitate the practices. The people involved in the studies as the participants were prisoners, prison staff (director, penitentiary police, educators, counselors) victims (direct and indirect), families, citizens, for a total of about 910 participants from about 31 prisons.

The studies included in this review were aimed at analyzing the impact of the implementation of restorative justice and its practices, both as a prison-wide approach and as practices activated in response to specific cases, through a comparison with the pre-implementation period. Specifically, in 81,8% (9 studies) of the studies, prisons provided traditional disciplinary practices and policies; in 18,2% (2 studies) prisons provided traditional disciplinary practices and policies oriented towards punitive approaches.

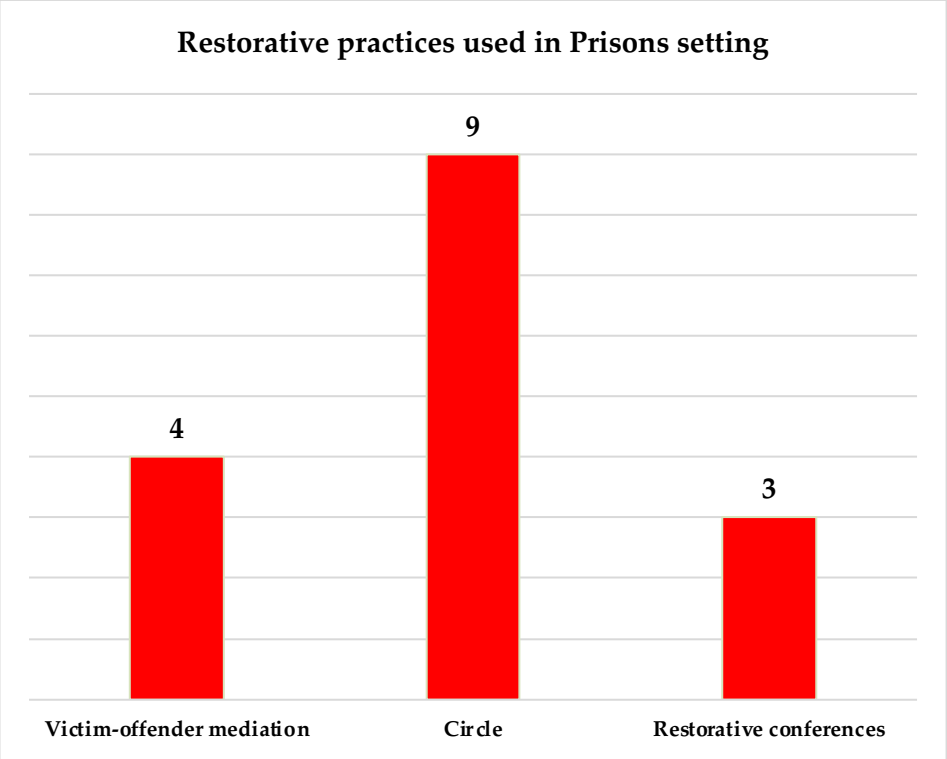
3.1.2.1. The restorative practices used in prison

In all 11 articles examined, it was found that every prison implemented and empowered at a minimum one restorative practice, either in terms of practices as part of the

treatment pathway or in terms of practices to manage, address and respond to conflict situations within the prison (e.g., harmful behaviour, violence).

As can be seen in Figure 8, the most frequently used restorative practices were circles (n=9), followed by victim-offender mediation (VOM) (n=4) and restorative conferences (n=3).

Figure 8. Restorative practices used in Prisons setting



Within prisons, restorative practices have been used both as practices that become part of the treatment pathway and as practices that are activated to manage, address, and respond to conflict situations within the prison (e.g., in situations of violent acts).

Concerning circles, the following have been activated: circles between prisoners and victims (Armour & Sliva, 2018; Walker & Greening, 2010; Weimann-Saks & Peleg-Koriat, 2020), circles between prisoners (Bohmert et al., 2018; Calkin, 2021; Gavrielides, 2014; Nowotny, 2018; Duwe, 2013; Duwe, 2018), circles between prisoners and prison guards (Calkin, 2021; Gavrielides, 2014; Walker & Greening, 2010), circles between prisoners and their families (Calkin, 2021; Walker & Greening, 2010), circles between prisoners and community members (Bohmert et al., 2018; Walker & Greening, 2010; Duwe, 2013; Duwe, 2018).

Circles between prisoners and families and between prisoners and community members were activated with the aim of fostering the (re)construction of positive relationships, also with a

view to reintegration into the community. In other cases, circles and conference have been activated instead of the traditional prisoners' councils.

Restorative conferences have been activated both to address and manage mostly serious conflicts and as alternative disciplinary processes in the case of acts for which a sanction was envisaged, to find a joint agreement on how to respond to the events that occurred, as well as at the end of victim-offender mediation processes.

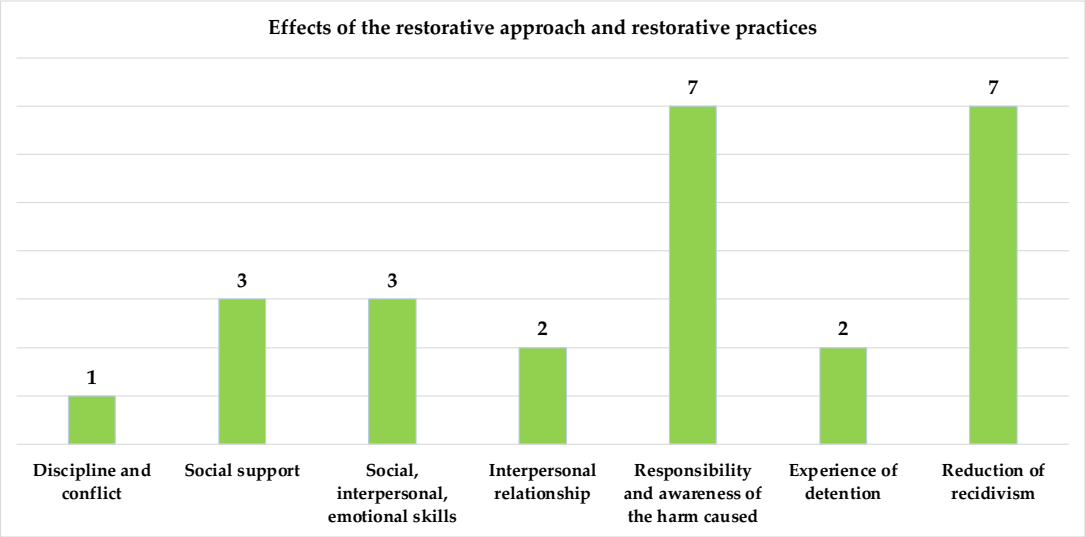
On the other hand, victim-offender mediation was activated in almost all cases at the request of the prisoners themselves who expressed a wish to meet the victim, except in the study of D'Souza, and Shapland (2023), as mediation was part of the trial and was therefore proposed by the researchers.

3.1.2.2. Effects of restorative approach and restorative practices

The analysis of the studies revealed positive results with regard to several aspects: reduction in incidents, disciplinary sanctions and prison offences and conflicts; increased ability to manage/resolve conflicts and increased problem-solving strategies and non-violent communication; increased personal and collective responsibility and group cohesion; increased responsibility and awareness for the harm caused to the victim and its consequences; offender's distancing from the criminal behaviour and deviant identity; greater sense of justice perceived by victims; reduction of recidivism; greater perceived social, moral, emotional and instrumental support, also with a view to re-entry into the community; (re)building of positive relationships between inmates, between inmates and families, between inmates and officers; perceived fairer processes and treatment respectful of human rights.

As can be seen from Figure 9, studies have shown that the effects of applying the restorative approach and restorative practices in prison are: discipline and conflict (n=1); support (n=5); social, interpersonal, and emotional skills (n=3); interpersonal relationships (2); responsibility and awareness of harm caused (n=7); experience of detention (n=2); reduction of recidivism (n=7).

Figure 9. Effects of the restorative approach and restorative practices



Studies have shown that restorative practices help to increase inmates' responsibility for their actions in terms of awareness of the harm caused to victims (Armour & Sliva, 2018; Bohmert et al., 2018; Duwe, 2013; Duwe, 2018; D'Souza & Shapland, 2023; Walker & Greening, 2010; Weimann-Saks & Peleg-Koriat, 2020) as a direct consequence of their own actions, compared to inmates who did not participate in such practices and that this is true even with detainees who manifest low or no self-acceptance of responsibility.

Furthermore, prisoners who have participated in programmes that include such practices show more positive attitudes towards the possibility of participating in a restorative process (Weimann-Saks & Peleg-Koriat, 2020) to repair the harm caused. In addition, mere exposure to videos of real (even indirect) victims telling their story and the harm they have suffered can also contribute to such outcomes.

Participation in restorative encounter groups within prison that involve prisoners and victims (Armour & Sliva, 2018; Stewart et al., 2018), or prisoners, prisoners and families, prisoners, and police officers (Calkin, 2021; Nowotny, 2018), can contribute to the development of both positive interpersonal relationships and social, interpersonal, and emotional skills. For example, an increase in trust, cooperation, caring and mutual support (Armour & Sliva, 2018; Stewart et al., 2018), the development of innovative strategies and methods of peaceful conflict management and problem-solving, respect, empathy, non-violent communication, and personal and collective responsibility can be evidenced (Calkin, 2021; Nowotny, 2018), and repercussions on mental and emotional well-being (D'Souza & Shapland, 2023).

The studies analyzed have shown that confrontation with one's own actions, consequences and the harm resulting from them, made possible by participation in restorative practices and/or processes, increases the likelihood of greater responsibility for the harm caused to the

victim. This significantly contributes to distancing the offender from the criminal behaviour and deviant identity, resulting in a reduction of recidivism (Armour & Sliva, 2018; Bohmert et al., 2018; Duwe, 2013; Duwe, 2018; D'Souza & Shapland, 2023; Stewart et al., 2018; Walker & Greening, 2010). The reduction of recidivism, and thus consequently of incarceration rates, also has effects on the costs of imprisonment for institutions/governments (Duwe, 2013; Duwe, 2018). Indeed, while the model and its implementation are already cost-effective compared to traditional prison programmes, lowering criminalization rates leads to a general reduction in the costs of the criminal justice and prison system.

In addition, social, moral, emotional, and instrumental support (e.g., in finding employment or housing, etc.) provided to offenders (Armour & Sliva, 2018; Duwe, 2013; Duwe, 2018; Stewart et al., 2018; Walker & Greening, 2010), both by victims and community members who participated in restorative processes, towards reintegration into the community, was found to contribute significantly to reducing recidivism rates. Furthermore, the study by Walker L. and Greening (2010) found that victims who participated in restorative practices and/or restorative processes experienced a greater sense of perceived justice.

The study by Nowotny et al. (2018) found that the systematized use of restorative practices can also lead to beneficial outcomes in terms of better skills in dealing with behavioural issues and prison discipline, as well as increased adherence to rules. In fact, a significant reduction in levels of violence and prison's crimes emerged with a consequent reduction in the need for disciplinary sanctions and punitive measures compared to when traditional practices were used, which included the use of force not only by inmates but also by prison staff.

Related to this is another aspect that emerged from some of the studies analyzed: sometimes, prison-internal decision-making systems and treatment methods are not always considered to be fair, legitimate, and respectful of prisoners' rights, and this negatively affects the detention experience of prisoners and prison staff (Calkin, 2021; Nowotny, 2018). Restorative processes could be used as decision-making practices for sentencing, prisoner councils or other ways of working within prisons, either when conflicts and/or incidents liable to disciplinary sanctions occur, or as dialogue and decision-making practices in general (Calkin, 2021; Nowotny, 2018). In this sense, both prisoners and prison staff who have experimented with restorative justice practices for these purposes report an improved experience of detention: restorative justice practices support respect, communication, personal and collective responsibility, and a rehabilitative culture, also acting in preventive terms regarding possible future situations.

In accordance with what just described, the need to implement restorative justice and practices to improve the prison experience opens the consideration of how restorative justice can be implemented as a whole-prison oriented disciplinary policy (Calkin, 2021; Gavrielides, 2014; Nowotny, 2018), also in combination with current prison policies, on how to combine restorative practices and treatment programmes (Duwe, 2013; Duwe, 2018; Stewart et al., 2018; Weimann-Saks & Peleg-Koriat, 2020) and on the difficulties that are encountered/can be encountered for these purposes, as well as in general for the application of restorative practices in prison. The difficulties encountered in the application of the restorative paradigm and the experimentation of restorative practices within prisons are due, for example, to current prison laws and the character of a prison itself (Gavrielides, 2014; Weimann-Saks & Peleg-Koriat, 2020).

Despite the positive outcomes that could be achieved, including in terms of reducing the costs of imprisonment (Duwe, 2013; Duwe, 2018; Gavrielides, 2014; Weimann-Saks & Peleg-Koriat, 2020), there is a lack of adequate training programmes for staff, support from institutions, regulatory and practical frameworks, guidelines, and economic investments (Calkin, 2021; Gavrielides, 2014; Nowotny, 2018; Stewart et al., 2018; Weimann-Saks & Peleg-Koriat, 2020), considered key aspects for the application of restorative practices in prison. Furthermore, the study by D'Souza and Shapland (2023) preliminarily reveals a lack of knowledge of the paradigm. This is due to a lack of adequate training in the subject. Another aspect that emerges from this study is the apprehension surrounding the application of restorative justice and its practices in cases of serious crimes.

3.1.3. Discussion

The purpose of this research was to examine which restorative justice practices have been implemented in prisons and what kind of results have been achieved. It emerged that the most used restorative practices are circles, i.e., practices involving several people rather than practices involving only the victim and the offender, such as victim-offender mediation (VOM). This, on the one hand, might confirm that the use of restorative justice is due as a more comprehensive and holistic approach than traditional models, on the other hand, the difficulty of being able to activate restorative processes with the involvement of victims within prison. Firstly, the results of this study show that most of the restorative paths activated had mainly rehabilitative/treatment goals, underlining a still very reocentric vision. Overcoming the vision of the centrality of the prison and the prisoner to shift the attention to the victim should be a prerogative, since restorative justice was born to give victims a space to listen and to respond to needs that remained unheard and/or unreceived by

traditional justice systems and where the victim does not have to 'serve' the offender's re-educative process.

The circles represented moments of reflection, listening, sharing of the actions performed and of the consequent harm, also through direct confrontation with the harm (in the cases of circles between prisoners and victims, both direct and indirect). In some cases, circles and conferences were activated instead of traditional prisoner councils.

It emerges that the offender's encounter with the victim and/or the harm caused can help the offender to become aware of the harm and to take responsibility for his or her actions in terms of the consequences on the victim. This can also be a protective factor against the risk of reoffending. Moreover, in broader terms, restorative processes enable the parties involved to mend the relational fracture that has been created because of the crime committed. Indeed, the offence harms interpersonal and social relationships, e.g., with family and community members, as well as with victims, who are inextricably linked to their offender. The restorative practices activated made it possible to help support people in the (re)creation of a responsible and supportive relational context, made up of a critical re-elaboration by the offender of his conduct (involving also, when necessary and possible, the victim), of a personal restorative commitment, of a restoration of life according to legality. These aspects have proved to be central to the offender's social recovery with a view to reintegration into the community, as well as in preventing re-offending and recidivism, and in reducing incarceration rates (Thomas et al., 2019; Strémy & Griger, 2020). This also influenced the costs of incarceration for institutions/governments, as the reduction of criminalization rates led to an overall reduction in the costs of criminal justice and the prison system, which is also in line with the relevant literature (Aos et al., 2006).

Restorative justice processes and practices have also been activated to address the various conflicts that have occurred within prisons, both as a prison disciplinary policy aimed at building safer places in which to serve one's sentence and work.

Restorative circles and conferences have proved to be useful practices for the management of conflicts, problems, and detrimental behaviour of prisoners (e.g., violence and offences), as they have enabled the construction of listening moments useful for co-constructing responsibilities, as well as meaningful actions and solutions through the involvement of all parties concerned and/or affected by the detrimental conduct. In addition, there was an increase in pro-social behaviour, trust, fairness and positive relationships, empathy, awareness, and responsibility, foster the ability to express and manage emotions, mental and emotional well-being. Therefore, the use of restorative practices can lead to positive outcomes in terms of increased ability to manage behavioural problems and prison

discipline, reduced levels of violence and prison offences and a consequent reduction in the need for disciplinary sanctions and punitive measures (Millana et al., 2020).

The activation of restorative conferences as an alternative to traditional disciplinary processes represented participatory and co-constructive decision-making processes that allowed for proactive and respectful engagement in addressing the problem/conflict and finding common ways and solutions to resolve it, rather than having a sanction imposed passively.

A certain difficulty in implementing the restorative approach and restorative practices in prison has emerged and the complexity of implementing restorative justice cannot be underestimated. Although it is essential to define models, standards, and guidelines with respect to the implementation of these practices, it is not possible to apply a standard and univocal model, especially within places such as prisons, and therefore each action must always be adapted, constructed, studied, since the place where it is experienced. Some problems arise from the difficulty of involving/motivating prisoners, since, on the one hand, sometimes the proposal to participate in restorative justice pathways is late and the prisoner may believe that detention itself, and thus serving the sentence, is already an assumption of responsibility for the crime committed and that he is already paying his debt for it. On the other hand, within prison there are rules and codes of behaviour that very often hinder the possibility of participating in pathways that involve talking about the crime, one's emotions and feelings, and confrontation with other people, especially with prison staff and even more so with prison officers (Albrecht, 2011). The involvement of victims is also sometimes complex. As for prisoners, the proposal to participate in restorative justice processes is sometimes delayed for victims and, due to the closure of the trial with the conviction of the offender, they may feel satisfied with the sentence, consider the punishment just and not want to reopen the wounds. In addition, victims may perceive that they are being 'used' for the offender's re-education process and/or to obtain benefits from the offender and/or that the offender's choice to participate is not so much due to a real desire to be accountable for the actions committed and their consequences as to possible rewards, even though, in both cases, the prisoner does not actually benefit directly. Finally, it is possible that the proposal to meet the prisoner in prison may frighten the victim, since, also due to stereotypes and prejudices, prison is seen and perceived as an insecure and potentially re-victimizing place (Wood, 2016).

Another difficulty concerns the implementation of the restorative approach as a disciplinary strategy in prison, if its implementation does not consider the already existing disciplinary system and does not act to build a single system that considers the specificities

of both (Perán, 2017; Wood, 2016). It is essential to customize programmes and procedures through a context assessment that identifies the main areas of strength and possible areas to be exploited, starting from small changes to an extended and shared action plan. This has been very difficult to achieve due to the lack of: adequate training programs for staff; support from institutions; regulatory and practical frameworks; and economic guidelines and investments. These emerge as key aspects for the implementation of restorative practices in prison and for rethinking prison itself as a place where the principles and values of restorative justice and its practices can be integrated within the prison paradigm, where the use of alternative methods can have significant therapeutic effects.

Reflection on current punitive disciplinary policies within prison systems is a health justice issue and the value of implementing alternative systems and practices, such as restorative justice, is increasingly emphasized. Indeed, it is crucial to foster new actions that aim to promote responsibility in the offender for the actions perpetrated and for the harm suffered by the victim, that counteract the negative effects of incarceration, and that restore the relationship with the community (Romano, 2011; 2012), instead of traditional approaches that sometimes further increase suffering, fragility, vulnerability, and inequalities. Prisons provide disciplinary policies that are predominantly punitive in nature, in which prisoners are passive subjects and sole beneficiaries of predetermined rehabilitation/treatment programmes, when instead the challenge would be to think of restorative justice models that are flexible and consider specific educational, psychological, and contextual needs.

Moreover, communication within the prison is marked by internal laws such that talking about actions committed and personal matters, as well as with prison staff (especially officers) is very often in conflict with prison codes, which makes the prison itself an unsafe place. The management of daily prison life is articulated through regulations and rules that, to enforce/maintain internal social order, provide for forms of surveillance and disciplinary sanctions/measures, issued directly by the prison warden, in the event of their violation. This approach, however, requires the quasi-passive obedience of prisoners to the prison authorities and the need to comply with the rules becomes a means of avoiding disciplinary sanctions. Thus, it becomes increasingly necessary for institutions and practitioners to work towards restorative justice practices becoming complementary to those already present in traditional justice systems (Moreno Álvarez, 2019).

The starting assumption, therefore, becomes the need to try to change one's view of rule-breaking: misconduct is not only a violation of rules, but also a violation of human beings and relationships, actions have consequences, and these consequences can cause pain/harm

to those who suffer them. A restorative process pushes people to take responsibility for the actions they have taken because, instead of having a sanction imposed on them, they are asked to confront others and engage proactively, constructively, and respectfully in addressing the problem/conflict/harm and finding together strategies and solutions to solve it. In this way, the restorative approach and practices can facilitate collaborative and cooperative decision-making processes with respect to what is right to do to restore harm, resolve conflict and heal a wounded relationship, thus contributing to building a fair, safe, supportive, and inclusive prison environment and, at the same time, promoting and developing interpersonal and individual skills such as empathy, self-efficacy, and non-violent communication (Butler & Maruna, 2016; Millana et al., 2020). Moreover, as demonstrated by virtuous experiences in this field (Lepri et al., 2019; Liebmann, 2019; Straker, 2019; Van Cleynenbreugel, 2019), restorative justice and its practices make it possible to promote accountability (a central element in rehabilitation/treatment pathways) and social security (fundamental for communities in view of offender reintegration) and consequently the community should always be included in prison work as well.

From the studies reviewed, interesting findings emerged regarding the benefits of the application of restorative justice and restorative practices in prisons, as also confirmed by the scientific literature on the subject, and by the theoretical articles and reviews in Appendix 3 (Table A3).

4. Concluding thoughts, limitations and future implications

This study was conducted according to the PRISMA guidelines, and its purpose was to provide an overview of the adoption of restorative approach practices in prisons and to demonstrate their benefits. Although this review indicates positive results, the criteria for the realization and implementation of restorative approach practices in prisons are changeable and highly dependent on regulatory and institutional policies.

The importance of understanding the restorative approach as an influential element of cultural and institutional transformation implies that cultural and institutional transformations themselves are deterrents to the implementation of restorative justice practices in prisons. Reflections on the current knowledge, implementation and sustainability of restorative justice and its practices in prisons, as well as the difficulties in their integration within prison disciplinary systems, pose theoretical and practical challenges. For this purpose, further studies on the topic would both enable a better understanding of the potential implications of restorative justice and restorative practices in promoting desired outcomes, and support institutions and prisons in implementing effective

interventions and ensuring a positive, safe, respectful, equitable and welfare-oriented prison environment. Furthermore, a qualitative synthesis was carried out in this review. Therefore, it should be emphasized that a systematic review that includes a quantitative synthesis of the data would certainly be necessary to provide a comprehensive research picture of the available evidence on the beneficial and effective use of restorative justice and restorative practices in prisons.

Finally, the evidence in terms of direct correlation about the benefits of restorative justice and restorative practices in prisons is still limited and suggests further studies. Therefore, most of the studies about restorative justice and practices in prison are published in non-indexed journals and therefore their actual impact on the prison population may currently be underestimated.

CHAPTER III. RESTORATIVE ATTITUDE

1. Defining restorative attitude

Although attention to restorative justice literature has increased recently (Hermann, 2017), information on individuals' restorative attitudes, definitions, and measurements still needs to be studied. Some studies show conflicting opinions on whether certain dimensions, which appear to be restorative attitudes, should be included in conceptualisations related to restorative justice. For example, Kohen (2009) states that forgiveness and reconciliation are fundamental elements in restorative justice, but that forgiveness is a necessary component while reconciliation is the goal towards which it should strive and that, therefore, without forgiveness there can be no reconciliation. Conversely, for Zehr (2002), forgiveness and reconciliation are not necessarily related to restorative justice. However, Strelan et al. (2011) pointed out that forgiveness and restorative justice have elements in common, so that the former can be functional to the latter.

Howard Zehr first spoke of a restorative attitude in 2002. Despite this, the concept of restorative attitude has not been sufficiently theorised and studied as an existing, operationalizable and therefore measurable construct. Some studies have focused on the factors that influence attitudes towards restorative justice, associating them, on the one hand, with individual variables such as the greater or lesser subjective emotional response of fear to crime (Costelloe et al., 2009) and, on the other hand, with cultural variables such as social capital (Ahlin et al., 2017; Huang et al., 2012). Other studies that have focused on the relationship between the type of crime committed and the formation of attitudes towards restorative justice have shown that this relationship is not mediated by fear or the perceived severity of the crime, but rather by a growing belief that the offender can change (Weimann-Saks et al., 2022). To better understand individuals' attitudes toward alternative sanctions, Taylor and Bailey (2022), drawing on the conceptual arguments of restorative justice without providing a clear definition of the construct, opted for a five-factor solution based on restorative justice: empathic understanding, harm and needs, restorative processes, accountability, and community involvement. Okimoto et al. (2012) examined how individuals' orientation toward restorative approaches differed from traditional retributive justice orientations using a measure that polarised participants' responses in two opposite directions; on the one hand, a restorative orientation was associated with a shared sense of self and adherence to group norms and values, while a retributive orientation was associated with personality traits such as narcissism and a focus on status and power.

Therefore, the need to operationalise the construct of restorative attitude stems from gaps found in the literature.

2. A qualitative study for a new conceptualization model

2.1. Aims of the study

In line with the restorative justice paradigm, the aims of the research were to:

1) Empirically substantiate the restorative attitude construct, providing a definition of it.
2) Identify its component dimensions.

2.2. Materials and methods

A qualitative study was conducted to satisfy the research objectives. A protocol for this study was published on OSF in June 2023.

2.2.1. Participants

A total of 81 people participated, of whom 26 took part in the interviews (30.77% Italian experts and 69.23% European experts) and 55 in an open-ended questionnaire (all Italian) administered in small groups in presence. The interviews were conducted with 26 national and international restorative justice experts. The questionnaire was answered by 55 university students with previous knowledge of the topics under investigation (students in the psychological, social and legal fields). The age of the participants in the questionnaire ranged from 19 to 45 years (M = 23; SD = 6.37), while for the individual interviews, it ranged from 32 to 73 (M = 52.34; SD = 11.95).

The individual interviews were conducted through a Microsoft Teams connection after an appointment with the participants. The questionnaire, on the other hand, was filled in during university lecture hours at both universities by projecting a QR code that referred to the online protocol.

2.2.2. Instruments

The qualitative study was conducted with (a) questionnaire consisting of 5 open-ended questions and (b) structured individual interviews consisting of 3 open-ended questions.

A search protocol divided into key sections was created to investigate participants' perceptions of concepts of restorative attitudes. The sections of the questionnaire were: a) biographical information, including the gender and age of the participants, and b) 5 open-ended questions: (1) "What is justice for you?", (2) "When people violate the rules one should...?", (3) "People who suffer injustice/wrongdoing/crime need...?", (4) "People who

are perpetrators of injustice/wrongdoing/crime need...?", (5) "Those who commit an injustice/wrongdoing/offence deserve...?". The information detected through the individual interview with experts were: a) biographical information, including the gender, age, and country of the participants; b) 3 open-ended questions: (1) "Does the restorative attitude exist?", (2) "What thoughts/feelings/behaviours characterise a restorative attitude?", (3) "What areas should a restorative attitude questionnaire cover?".

2.2.3. Procedure

All participants agreed to participate in the research, and consent was also obtained for the interviews to join the audio recording. Participants were recruited according to a criterion of convenience. In particular, (a) for the questionnaire, information was disseminated to students regarding the possibility of participating in the research, with the support of other lecturers from the universities involved. No exclusion criteria were adopted for either the interviews or the questionnaire; (b) for the individual interviews, experts on the official list of qualified trainers of the European Forum for Restorative Justice were contacted. Participation in the study was entirely voluntary; therefore, all participants were free to leave the research at any time. To ensure respect for anonymity and avoid double filling in, each questionnaire participant was assigned a code using the initial letters of their first and last name and date of birth.

All answers to the questions were entered into an Excel file. Once the files were cleaned, the participants' answers were analysed in their original language, Italian and English (for foreign participants only). Two bilingual research experts (1 native Italian speaker with excellent knowledge of English and one native English speaker with excellent knowledge of Italian) translated the interviews into Italian. The experts translated the interviews independently and then through a joint discussion. To ensure that there were no wrong interpretations, a final check was carried out by a third expert with expertise in Italian and English and who confirmed the final version of the interview translations.

The research followed the ethical rules of the Italian Psychological Association for psychological research, the Code of Ethics for Italian Psychologists and the Declaration of Helsinki.

2.2.4. Data analysis

Data analyses were conducted using IBM SPSS Statistics for Windows, Version 25.0. (IBM Corporation, Armonk, NY, USA) software program for statistical analysis and percentages and Microsoft Excel v16.56 (21121100) to classify the participants' answers. A content

analysis was conducted for the most relevant topics (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005) through an inductive (i.e. data-driven) and non-deductive (i.e. hypothesis-driven) approach, as also emphasised by grounded theory methods (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005). Several researchers (Charmaz, 2006; Charmaz & Shifting, 2009; Corbin & Strauss, 2008) emphasise that these methodologies add intellectual rigour to scientific research.

The questionnaire was carried out via a Google form. A file was created containing the extraction categories of the answers which were then analysed with SPSS 25.0. In the first step, 51% of the answers (28) were categorised. The categories that emerged were then verified for the remaining 49% (27) of the responses by two independent coders (Losito, 2002). The analyses were carried out separately by two researchers and two other researchers intervened to resolve the few discrepancies that emerged in the coding of the data. This resulted in a version of the analyses that all researchers were satisfied with and allowed the research results to be completed. The two independent experts coded the answers according to the constructed categories. Frequency analysis was then performed using SPSS 25.0 software programme.

The individual interviews with the experts were audio-recorded and transcribed in a Word file and then in an Excel file. As with the questionnaires, in a first step 50% (13) of the interview answers were categorised. The categories that emerged were then verified for the remaining 50% (13) of the responses by two independent coders (Losito, 2002). The two independent coders coded the interviews according to the categories that emerged. Only in three interviews were there different modes of interpretation by the independent coders (only one category interpreted differently by the coders for each interview). The three interviews were submitted to two further independent coders and then to the research supervisor. The final discussion with the supervisor and the research team resolved disagreements on these three interviews. Subsequently, frequency analysis of the categories deduced from the responses was carried out using SPSS 25.0 software programme.

The response categories with the highest frequency were chosen for both questionnaires and interviews.

2.3. Results

2.3.1. Questionnaires

The frequency analysis showed that the most frequent answers to the question “What is justice for you?” referred to the concept of “fairness” (32), emphasising aspects such as equality, protection/respect/recognition of rights, freedom; “punishment” (12); “respect for State rules and laws” (11). Table 1 summarises the results of the frequency analysis.

The answers to the question “When people violate the rules one should...?” were “punish” (43) and “re-educate” (22). Table 2 summarises the results of the frequency analysis.

To the question “People who suffer injustice/wrongdoing/crime need...?”, the answers were “support” (32), “protection and guarantee from the State” (20), “justice (formal)” (12). Table 3 summarises the results of the frequency analysis.

To the question “People who are perpetrators of injustice/wrongdoing/crime need...?”, the answers were “re-education/rehabilitation/treatment” (47) and “punishment” (16). Table 4 summarises the results of the frequency analysis.

Finally, the answers to the question “Those who commit an injustice/wrongdoing/offence deserve...?” were “punishment commensurate with the seriousness of the offence” (26), “punishment” (22) and “re-education/rehabilitation/treatment” (20). Table 5 summarises the results of the frequency analysis.

Table 1: “What is justice for you?”

Answer	**Frequency**
Equity	32
Punishment	12
Respect for the rules and laws of the State	11
Victim Protection/Security	5
Other	5
Offender rehabilitation/treatment	3
Compensation	2

Table 2: “When people violate the rules, one should...?”

Answer	**Frequency**
Punish	43
Re-educate	22

Table 3: “People who suffer injustice/wrongdoing/crime need...?”

Answer	**Frequency**
Support	32
Protection and guarantee from the State	20
Formal justice	12

Table 4: “People who are perpetrators of injustice/wrongdoing/crime need...?”

Answer	**Frequency**
Re-education/rehabilitation/treatment	47
Punishment	16

Table 5: “Those who commit an injustice/wrongdoing/offence deserve...?”

Answer	**Frequency**
Punishment commensurate with the seriousness of the offence	26
Punishment	22
Re-education/rehabilitation/treatment	20

2.3.2. Interviews

In line with the above, to satisfy the research objectives of empirically substantiating the construct of restorative attitude and its dimensions, 26 experts in restorative justice, both national (30.77% Italian expert) and international (69.23% European expert), were interviewed. The interview consisted of 3 questions.

To the question "Does the restorative attitude exist?", 21 people answered "yes" and 5 "no" (Table 6). To the question "What thoughts/feelings/behaviours characterise a restorative attitude?" the most frequent answer was "empathy" (33), which included answers referring to aspects such as emotional closeness (11), caring for the other person (10), understanding the other person (12) for states of mind. Next, the most frequent answers were: "responsibility" (19), i.e. taking one's responsibility and asking the other to take on his or her responsibility within relationships; "respect" (16), for oneself and others (see Table 7).

Table 6: "Does the restorative attitude exist?"

Answer	**Frequency**
Yes	21
No	5

Table 7: "What thoughts/feelings/behaviours characterise a restorative attitude?"

Answer	**Frequency**
Empathy	33
Responsibility	19
Respect	16
Change	9
Trust	6
Reconciliation	5
Other	4
Sincerity	3
Kindness	3
Forgiveness	2
Security	2
Formal Justice	2
Hope	6

Finally, as Table 8 shows, the most frequent answers to the question "What areas should a restorative attitude questionnaire cover?" were "responsibility" (17), "respect" (14), and "sense of justice" (14).

Table 8: "What areas should a restorative attitude questionnaire cover?"

Answer	**Frequency**
Responsibility	17
Respect	14
Sense of justice	14
Empathy	9

Sense of community	8
Practical examples	6
Past experiences of restorative justice	5
Other	1

2.4. Discussion

In line with the restorative justice paradigm, there are only a few studies on restorative attitudes, which are limited to investigating attitudes towards justice or constructs that refer to certain aspects of the concept of restoration (such as forgiveness and reconciliation) without grasping it in its entirety (e.g., Kohen, 2009; Taylor & Bailey, 2022; Strelan et al., 2011). Furthermore, there is nothing on the possibility that it is an existing, operationalizable and therefore measurable construct. To achieve the research objective, it was deemed appropriate to preliminarily explore participants' "meaning of justice" and the responses they would adopt in relation to unjust or illegal actions, such as a crime.

By open-ended questionnaires and structured interviews, participants were asked to reflect on the emotional, cognitive and behavioural dimensions involved in situations of harm and conflict, as well as on the principles that, in their opinion, should guide restorative responses. Qualitative analysis of the interviews and questionnaires revealed a consistent and recurring pattern in participants' representations of justice and reparation. Specifically, four main dimensions emerged that can be interpreted as the fundamental factors of a restorative attitude: responsibility, respect, sense of justice and empathy.

- Responsibility refers to the perceived importance of recognising one's actions and their consequences for others, as well as the willingness to take an active role in repairing the harm.
- Respect encompasses both the recognition of the other as a person worthy of dignity and the rejection of dehumanising or exclusionary responses.
- The dimension of sense of justice captures the individual's orientation towards fairness and the search for a balance between the needs of victims, offenders and the community.
- Finally, empathy represents the emotional capacity to take on the perspective of others, to understand their experiences and motivations, and to respond in ways that promote relational understanding rather than blame.

Taken together, these factors outline a multidimensional construct that expresses the individual's general tendency to process harmful or unjust situations through relational and value-based lenses. Individuals characterised by more restorative attitudes tend to interpret

wrongful actions as an opportunity for understanding and transformation rather than mere punishment.

These preliminary findings not only confirm the theoretical plausibility of the restorative attitude as a measurable construct but also provide an empirical basis for its dimensional structure. The emerging factors are highly consistent with internationally shared restorative values (EFRJ, 2018; 2021) and resonate with key principles identified in the foundational literature on restorative justice (Zehr, 2002; Braithwaite, 2002). They are also in line with contemporary perspectives that view restorative justice as a broader relational and cultural paradigm rather than a set of procedural interventions (Marder, 2020).

3. A quantitative study: a measuring scale

3.1. Aims of the study

Another outcome of the qualitative study described in the previous paragraphs was the construction of a scale aimed at measuring the restorative attitude construct.

3.2. Materials and method

3.2.1. Participants

358 people aged between 18 and 77 (M=34.26; SD=13.39) participated in the study. 65.1% were women and 34.9% were men; 98.6% were Italian nationals.

3.2.2. Instruments

The four dimensions identified in a pool of items were made operational to develop and validate the quantitative tool for assessing the construct of restorative attitude. Initially, 85 items were identified, and it was decided to use the semantic differential technique. The use of semantic differential (Osgood et al., 1957) is justified by its ability to detect attitudes indirectly and multidimensionally, reducing social desirability bias and allowing analysis of how participants attribute meaning to concepts and objects of study. This approach, by translating subjective assessments into quantitative data, allows for a more rigorous scientific exploration of the structure of the attitudes investigated. For an example, see Table 9.

Table 9: Example of scale items using semantic differential

Right	7	6	5	4	3	2	1	Unfair
Flexible	7	6	5	4	3	2	1	Inflexible
Coherent	7	6	5	4	3	2	1	Incoherent
Adequate	7	6	5	4	3	2	1	Inadequate
Important	7	6	5	4	3	2	1	Insignificant
Fundamental	7	6	5	4	3	2	1	Secondary
Useful	7	6	5	4	3	2	1	Useless

3.2.3. Procedure

Participants gave their consent to participate in the research and, aware of the future publication of the results in this thesis, completed an online survey. The online survey was conducted by transferring the constructed scale and demographic questions to a Google form.

Participants were recruited according to a convenience criterion, e.g. by disseminating the questionnaire on social networks. No exclusion criteria were applied.

The questionnaire, which was completed individually, took approximately 15-20 minutes to complete. Participants were free to leave the study at any time. To respect anonymity and avoid double completions, each participant was asked to assign themselves a code using the first two letters of their first and last names and their date of birth.

The research followed the ethical rules of the Code of Ethics for Italian Psychologists, the Italian Association of Psychology for Psychological Research, and the Declaration of Helsinki.

3.2.4. Data analysis

The software used for data analysis was: (a) IBM SPSS Statistics, version 25.0, to calculate descriptive statistics and perform exploratory factor analysis (EFA); and (b) LISREL version 12.5.1 for confirmatory factor analysis (CFA).

3.3. Results

First, an exploratory factor analysis (EFA) was performed according to principal axis factorisation using the promax rotation method and Kaiser normalisation. Subsequently, a confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) was performed.

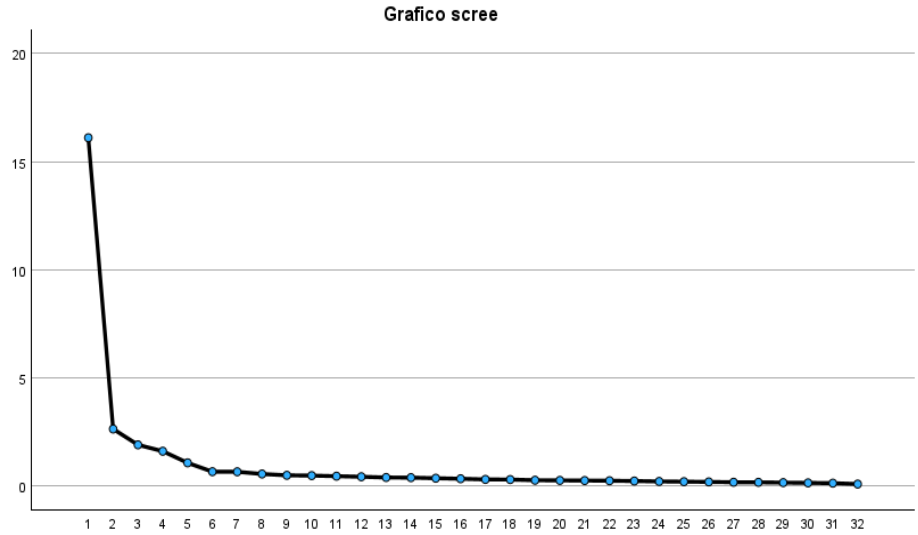
The EFA was performed by initially testing a four-factor structure, as hypothesised by the results of the qualitative study. During the analyses, items with significant cross-loadings (saturations greater than .30 on multiple factors) were eliminated, retaining the item only if the main loading was sufficiently distinct (Costello & Osborne, 2005; Tabachnick & Fidell, 2019). Table 10 shows the results of this analysis.

Table 10: four-factor EFA

	Factors			
	Responsibility	**Sense of justice**	**Empathy**	**Respect**
77. antisocial - sociable	.895			
82. dishonest - honest	.852			
76. worthy - unworthy	.834			
78. closed - open	.816			
83. inefficient - efficient	.785			
73. selfish - altruistic	.756			
54. despicable - admirable	.737			
58. irresponsible - responsible	.732			
72. aggressive - peaceful	.728			
53. contemptible - admirable	.725			
51. undeserving - deserving	.694			
50. foolish - intelligent	.692			
57. loser - winner	.675			
56. fearful - courageous	.662			
79. introverted - extroverted	.634			
55. irrecoverable - recoverable	.620			
64. indefensible - defensible	.611			
5. insignificant - important		.934		
7. useless - useful		.898		
4. inadequate - adequate		.851		
8. disadvantageous - advantageous		.805		
6. secondary - fundamental		.789		
3. inconsistent - consistent		.705		
1. unfair - fair		.671		
29. merciful - merciless			.769	
26. strict - lenient			.713	
30. ruthless - compassionate			.709	
28. rigid - flexible			.608	
11. difficult - easy				.795
19. relative - absolute				.681
13. unstable - stable				.670
9. unpredictable - predictable				.628

Although the KMO measure and Bartlett's sphericity test were significant (p=<.001), the 4-factor structure showed a saturation of items predominantly on factor 1. Furthermore, the scree plot (fig. 10) highlighted the possibility of a multi-factor structure. Therefore, a larger factorial structure was tested.

Figure 10. 4-factor EFA scree plot



The EFA was therefore carried out by testing a five-factor structure (see table 11).

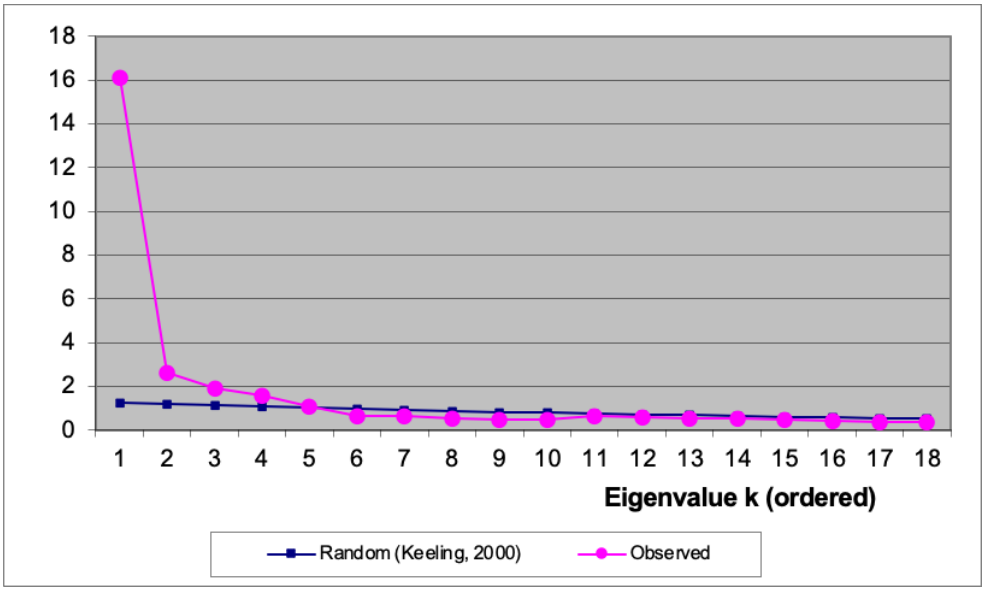
Table 11: five-factor EFA

	Factors				
	Responsibility	**Sense of justice**	**Empathy**	**Respect**	**Flexibility/ open-mindedness**
54. despicable - appreciable	.877				
51. undeserving - deserving	.871				
64. indefensible - defensible	.866				
58. irresponsible - responsible	.852				
50. foolish - intelligent	.838				
53. contemptible - admirable	.822				
56. fearful - courageous	.818				
55. irrecoverable - recoverable	.770				
57. losing - winning	.762				
76. worthy - unworthy	.715				
82. dishonest - honest	.694				
83. inefficient - efficient	.636				
5. insignificant - important		.932			
7. useless - useful		.907			
6. secondary - fundamental		.829			
4. inadequate - adequate		.804			
8. disadvantageous - advantageous		.753			
1. unfair - fair		.642			
3. inconsistent - consistent		.638			
78. closed - open			.839		
77. antisocial - sociable			.794		
73. selfish - altruistic			.734		
79. introverted - extroverted			.721		
72. aggressive - peaceful			.677		

26. strict - indulgent				.801	
29. merciful - merciless				.749	
30. ruthless - compassionate				.697	
28. rigid - flexible				.651	
11. difficult - easy					.755
13. unstable - stable					.671
19. relative - absolute					.656
9. unpredictable - predictable					.631

Subsequently, a parallel analysis was also performed, considered one of the most reliable methods for determining the number of factors (Glorfeld, 1995). As can be seen from figure 11, the parallel analysis identified a 5-factor solution as optimal. This decision is based on the criterion that only those factors whose real eigenvalues exceed those generated on random data with equal sample sizes and number of variables are retained.

Figure 11. Parallel analysis



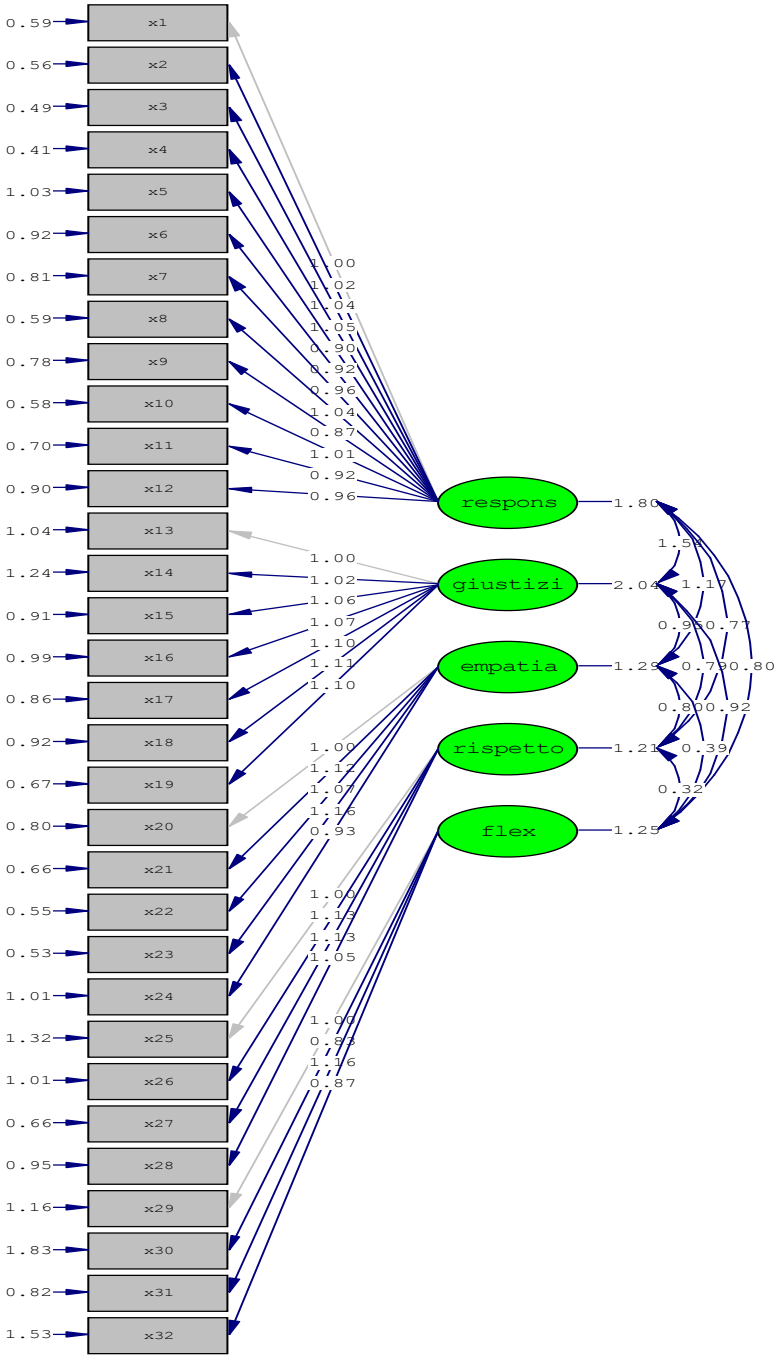
Based on this configuration, the 32 items of the scale are distributed across five factors, consistent with the suggestions of the parallel analysis. The factors are: 1) responsibility; 2) sense of justice; 3) empathy; 4) respect; 5) flexibility/open-mindedness. The final scale is shown in Appendix 5.

To confirm the factor structure identified in the exploratory phase, a confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) was subsequently conducted. This procedure made it possible to assess the quality of the 5-factor model's fit to the data and to verify its validity in terms of consistency with the distribution of items. The CFA, estimated using the maximum likelihood (ML) method, was then performed to verify the 5-factor structure previously identified. The results showed an adequate fit of the model: $\chi^2(454) = 1047.23$; χ^2/df ratio < 3; CFI = .99; RMSEA

= .06. These values are generally considered indicators of a good level of fit (Browne & Cudeck, 1993; Hu & Bentler, 1999).

Figure 12 shows the 5-factor measurement model that emerged from the CFA. The five latent factors are represented by ovals, while the 32 observed items are indicated in rectangles. The unidirectional arrows represent factor loadings (all statistically significant), while the curved arrows indicate correlations between factors. The small arrows next to the items represent measurement errors.

Figure 12. 5-factor CFA



3.3. Discussion

The study on the conceptualisation of the restorative attitude construct sought to provide a reference model capable of expanding scientific psychological literature, identifying the restorative attitude as a new attitude that becomes part of the macro container of attitudes currently identified in psychology; It is fundamental in the scientific literature on restorative justice, as it offers a further opportunity to improve and disseminate its paradigm. The proposed model can provide new insights into the content, structure, and function of restorative attitudes. It can enable an understanding of the nature of attitude and contribute to a broader understanding of the mechanisms underlying how people interpret and react to events. This study has several limitations. First, the sample size is limited, and the characteristics of the participants are likely not representative of those of the general population; however, the strength of the sample selection is related to the involvement of participants from different cultural backgrounds.

This preliminary study has allowed the basis to be laid for a quantitative study aimed at validating the construct of restorative attitude through the construction of a quantitative scale to measure it and assess its strength (e.g., in terms of its stability or intensity). For the quantitative study, the results emerging from factor analyses confirmed the soundness of the five-factor structure of the scale. Although the initial exploratory analysis tested a four-factor configuration, in line with the hypothesis of the qualitative study, this solution proved inadequate: the items tended to saturate predominantly on the first factor, suggesting the presence of a more complex underlying dimension. Parallel analysis provided further support for this interpretation, indicating that a five-factor solution was optimal, as it was considered more consistent with the observed data. The subsequent CFA allowed this structure to be empirically validated, showing satisfactory fit values. These indices fall within the criteria commonly adopted in the literature (Browne & Cudeck, 1993; Hu & Bentler, 1999), suggesting that the five-factor model adequately represents the data and can be considered a robust solution. The distribution of the 32 items across the five factors also appears consistent from a theoretical point of view. The dimensions that emerged — responsibility, sense of justice, empathy, respect, and flexibility/open-mindedness — reflect constructs relevant to the subject of study, confirming what was observed in the qualitative phase and enriching the understanding of the phenomenon under investigation. In particular, the distinct emergence of factors such as empathy and respect suggests that these dimensions are autonomous but interconnected aspects, with potential implications for both educational and clinical-interventional applications. In summary, the combination of EFA and CFA has made it possible to build a solid basis for the validation of the scale, ensuring both its

statistical consistency and theoretical coherence. These results make a significant contribution to the literature on the subject, providing a reliable tool for assessing the dimensions considered. It should be noted that the validation of the scale is still at a preliminary stage. Other validity indicators, such as convergent and discriminant validity, and the internal reliability of individual factors, have not been examined and will need to be explored in further studies. Furthermore, factor invariance with respect to socio-demographic variables (e.g., gender or age) has not been tested, which is relevant for assessing the stability of the structure in different population subgroups. Looking ahead, the scale may be a useful tool not only for research but also for applied practice, for example, in assessing restorative attitudes in educational, judicial, or mediation contexts. Future studies could extend the sample, test the stability of the model over time and in different cultural contexts, and test the relationships between the factors that emerged and external variables of interest (e.g., value orientations, attitudes towards justice or prosocial behaviours). In this way, it will be possible to further consolidate the validity of the construct and enhance the scale as a reliable tool for investigating a psychological attitude that lies at the crossroads between the personal and social dimensions.

4. Concluding thoughts, limitations and future implications

This study has contributed to conceptualising and measuring punitive/restorative attitudes, proposing a theoretical model and a scale consisting of 32 items distributed across five factors. The results of the factor analyses confirmed the statistical soundness and theoretical consistency of the identified structure, reinforcing the relevance of the dimensions that emerged — responsibility, sense of justice, empathy, respect, and flexibility/open-mindedness. At the same time, it is necessary to recognise the limitations associated with the still preliminary stage of validation, the composition of the sample, and the lack of further validity and reliability checks. Future studies could extend the research to larger and more diverse samples, test the stability and invariance of the structure, and investigate relationships with external variables of interest. Despite these limitations, the results obtained provide a solid basis for the development of further research tools and offer useful insights for both scientific research and practical application in the field of restorative justice and the understanding of social attitudes. In fact, this instrument could open new insights into the likelihood of restorative behaviours and prove valuable for the development and implementation of restorative justice practices and interventions that focus on or are inspired by restorative justice, and for understanding and deconstructing the stereotypes and stigmatisation that tend to relegate specific social groups to certain labels.

CHAPTER IV. AT THE SCHOOL OF RESTORATIVE JUSTICE: TRAINEE FACILITATORS

1. The path and working methods

Starting from the results obtained from the literature review presented in Chapter II, the path on restorative justice at school aimed to promote and test peer-to-peer restorative strategies both in response to possible situations of harm and conflict in schools and with a view to preventing potentially harmful actions.

The workshop also aimed to promote individual and collective well-being in the school community by promoting key variables of positive psychology, such as courage, optimism and hope.

The programme involved 44 students from two high schools in northern Sardinia. The students were divided into two groups, and each group attended a two-hour meeting once a month between September 2024 and April 2025, for a total of eight meetings per group. The programme, organised as a theoretical and practical workshop, included three theoretical training sessions aimed at deepening knowledge of the restorative justice paradigm, its values and principles, its programmes and practices, and its contexts of application, with a specific focus on schools. The choice of group work methodology allowed participants to experiment with the restorative approach by putting into practice the concept of "*doing things with the group*": reflecting together on situations relating to their own environmental and relational context becomes a way of finding alternative solutions, new opportunities to act in a restorative manner and plan actions to that end. The classroom training deepened the perspective of restorative justice, focusing on the values and principles of restorative justice, but above all on learning the tools and restorative actions to be implemented in the classroom and/or at school. For this reason, skill acquisition methods were used that would make students an active part of the learning process, namely: a) accompanying classroom lectures with restorative circles at the beginning and end of each session; b) using the circle practice to work on cases of conflict and/or harm brought by students and/or the trainer, i.e. to reflect on, address and manage them according to the restorative approach.

2. The research

2.1. Aims of the study

Based on the theoretical framework and previous findings, particularly the systematic literature review at school (Chapter II), the following hypotheses were formulated:

H1. Participants in the training group will show a significant increase in their sense of school community from pre-test to post-test, particularly in the sub-dimension of membership and emotional connection.
H2. Participants in the training group will show a significant increase in restorative attitudes from pre-test to post-test, in all the sub-dimensions.
H3. Participants in the training group will show a significant increase in psychological well-being levels from pre-test to post-test, particularly in the dimensions of competence, empathy, engagement, positive relations, and pro-social behaviour.

2.2. Materials and methods

2.2.1. Participants

The study involved 44 students from two secondary schools in the municipality of Tempio Pausania, aged between 16 and 19 (M=17.3; SD=0.800), of whom 7 (15.9%) were male, 34 (77.3%) female, and 3 (6.8%) other. 33 (75%) 75% (33) study at the High School "Dettori", while 25% (11) study at the High School "De Andrè". 11 (25%) are in their third year of secondary school, 20 (45.5%) are in their fourth year, and 13 (29.5%) are in their fifth year.

2.2.2. Instruments

Socio-demographic section: age, gender, school of affiliation, course year.
Restorative attitude scale, composed of 32 items assessed using semantic differential. The scale is divided into five sub-dimensions: responsibility, sense of justice, empathy, respect, and flexibility/open-mindedness.
Scale of Sense of Community in the School (SoC-S; Prati et al., 2017), consisting of 10 items on a 5-point Likert scale (from 1=not at all true to 5=completely true). The scale is divided into 3 domains for assessing the sense of community at school, namely membership, emotional connection and opportunities.
Well-Being Profile (WB-Pro; Marsh et al., 2020), in the Italian version validated by Scalas et al. (2023). The scale consists of 48 items on a 9-point Likert scale (1 = completely disagree; 9 = completely agree) and measures aspects of hedonic and eudaimonic well-being across 15 dimensions: competence, emotional stability, commitment, meaning, optimism, positive emotions, positive relationships, clear thinking, self-acceptance, autonomy, empathy, prosocial behaviour, resilience, self-esteem, and vitality.
Ten additional questions, including the following 5 in the pre- and post-tests: 1) For me, justice is... 2) When people break the rules, we should... 3) People who victims of crime are need... 4) People who commit crimes need... 5) People who commit crimes deserve...

The following five questions are only in the post-test: 6) What do you think you have understood about restorative justice? 7) What aspects of the restorative approach do you feel are close to your own way of feeling and acting? 8) What aspects of the restorative approach do you feel are far from your own way of feeling and acting? 9) How valuable has this journey been for you? 10) How do you think this approach could be incorporated into the school community?

2.2.3. Procedure

Students who were 18 or older, as well as the parents of students who were under 18, gave their consent to participate in the research and completed the online surveys using a Google form. The questionnaires, which were filled out individually, took about 15-20 minutes to complete.

A qualitative and quantitative questionnaire was completed before and after the intervention to evaluate the results. Then, students completed an online survey at two different times: at time 0 (before the start of training) and at time 1 (at the end of training). To ensure anonymity and avoid double responses, each student was asked to assign themselves a code using the first two letters of their first name and surname and their date of birth.

The responses to the qualitative questions were transferred to a Microsoft Excel v16.102 (25101223) file for analysis. For the analysis, the first version of the form was created based on 50% of the responses and then verified for the remaining 50% by two independent coders (Losito, 2002). The two independent experts coded the responses according to the categories constructed achieving a good level of inter-rater agreement (k=.092).

The research followed the ethical rules of the Italian Psychological Association for psychological research, the Code of Ethics for Italian Psychologists and the Declaration of Helsinki.

2.2.4. Data analysis

The software used for data analysis was IBM SPSS Statistics, version 29.0 (Armonk, NY, USA: IBM Corp.) to calculate descriptive statistics, and, to evaluate changes in the dimensions considered, a paired t-test was performed. A preliminary analysis was also conducted to check for missing values in the scale responses. No missing values were found. It was also calculated Cohen's d index to assess the effect size. To analyse the impact of the effect size, the following ranges were used: 0.20 small, 0.50 medium, 0.80 large (Cohen, 1988).

2.3. Results

2.3.1. Quantitative analysis

To evaluate the effectiveness of the programme, a paired t-test was conducted using SPSS software, which allowed us to verify whether there were significant changes between the pre- and post-programme.

About restorative attitude (Table 12), statistically significant differences emerge on three of the five sub-dimensions, namely "Responsibility" (p=.003), "Empathy" (p=<.001) and "Respect" (p=.004). The effect size analysis highlights that greatest impact was on the sub-dimension of "Empathy", followed by the sub-dimensions "Responsibility" and "Respect".

Table 12: Restorative attitude's results of paired samples t-test

Dimension	**PRE N = 44**		**POST N = 44**		***p***	**Cohen's d**
	M	**DS**	**M**	**DS**		
Responsibility	67.00	15.65	73.20	12.29	.003	0.44
Sense of justice	41.64	8.30	42.32	6.50	.564	0.09
Empathy	28.20	5.99	31.48	4.77	<.001	0.60
Respect	21.70	4.63	23.50	4.31	.004	0.40
Flexibility/Open-mindedness	17.41	5.93	18.50	4.44	.197	0.20

The averages of the responses in both the pre- and post-tests were also analysed. The results are shown graphically in the images below (fig. 13 and 14).

Figure 13. Averages of responses in the pre-test of the Restorative Attitude Scale

Restorative Attitude is …								
	Very	**Fairly**	**Not very**	**Neutral**	**Not very**	**Fairly**	**Very**	
Fair	7	6	5	4	3	2	1	**Unfair**
Consistent	7	6	5	4	3	2	1	**Inconsistent**
Appropriate	7	6	5	4	3	2	1	**Inadequate**
Important	7	6	5	4	3	2	1	**Insignificant**
Fundamental	7	6	5	4	3	2	1	**Secondary**
Useful	7	6	5	4	3	2	1	**Useless**
Advantageous	7	6	5	4	3	2	1	**Disadvantageous**
Predictable	7	6	5	4	3	2	1	**Unpredictable**
Easy	7	6	5	4	3	2	1	**Difficult**
Stable	7	6	5	4	3	2	1	**Unstable**
Absolute	7	6	5	4	3	2	1	**Relative**
Indulgent	7	6	5	4	3	2	1	**Strict**
Flexible	7	6	5	4	3	2	1	**Rigid**
Lenient	7	6	5	4	3	2	1	**Inclement**
Compassionate	7	6	5	4	3	2	1	**Ruthless**
Intelligent	7	6	5	4	3	2	1	**Foolish**
Deserving	7	6	5	4	3	2	1	**Undeserving**
Admirable	7	6	5	4	3	2	1	**Despicable**
Appreciable	7	6	5	4	3	2	1	**Contemptible**
Recoverable	7	6	5	4	3	2	1	**Irretrievable**
Courageous	7	6	5	4	3	2	1	**Fearful**
Winning	7	6	5	4	3	2	1	**Loser**
Responsible	7	6	5	4	3	2	1	**Irresponsible**
Defensible	7	6	5	4	3	2	1	**Indefensible**
Peaceful	7	6	5	4	3	2	1	**Aggressive**
Altruistic	7	6	5	4	3	2	1	**Selfish**
Worthy	7	6	5	4	3	2	1	**Unworthy**
Sociable	7	6	5	4	3	2	1	**Antisocial**
Open	7	6	5	4	3	2	1	**Closed**
Extroverted	7	6	5	4	3	2	1	**Introverted**
Honest	7	6	5	4	3	2	1	**Dishonest**
Efficient	7	6	5	4	3	2	1	**Inefficient**

Figure 14. Averages of responses in the post-test of the Restorative Attitude Scale

F_Restorative Attitude is …								
	Very	**Fairly**	**Not very**	**Neutral**	**Not very**	**Fairly**	**Very**	
Fair	7	6	5	4	3	2	1	**Unfair**
Consistent	7	6	5	4	3	2	1	**Inconsistent**
Appropriate	7	6	5	4	3	2	1	**Inadequate**
Important	7	6	5	4	3	2	1	**Insignificant**
Fundamental	7	6	5	4	3	2	1	**Secondary**
Useful	7	6	5	4	3	2	1	**Useless**
Advantageous	7	6	5	4	3	2	1	**Disadvantageous**
Predictable	7	6	5	4	3	2	1	**Unpredictable**
Easy	7	6	5	4	3	2	1	**Difficult**
Stable	7	6	5	4	3	2	1	**Unstable**
Absolute	7	6	5	4	3	2	1	**Relative**
Indulgent	7	6	5	4	3	2	1	**Strict**
Flexible	7	6	5	4	3	2	1	**Rigid**
Lenient	7	6	5	4	3	2	1	**Inclement**
Compassionate	7	6	5	4	3	2	1	**Ruthless**
Intelligent	7	6	5	4	3	2	1	**Foolish**
Deserving	7	6	5	4	3	2	1	**Undeserving**
Admirable	7	6	5	4	3	2	1	**Despicable**
Appreciable	7	6	5	4	3	2	1	**Contemptible**
Recoverable	7	6	5	4	3	2	1	**Irretrievable**
Courageous	7	6	5	4	3	2	1	**Fearful**
Winning	7	6	5	4	3	2	1	**Loser**
Responsible	7	6	5	4	3	2	1	**Irresponsible**
Defensible	7	6	5	4	3	2	1	**Indefensible**
Peaceful	7	6	5	4	3	2	1	**Aggressive**
Altruistic	7	6	5	4	3	2	1	**Selfish**
Worthy	7	6	5	4	3	2	1	**Unworthy**
Sociable	7	6	5	4	3	2	1	**Antisocial**
Open	7	6	5	4	3	2	1	**Closed**
Extroverted	7	6	5	4	3	2	1	**Introverted**
Honest	7	6	5	4	3	2	1	**Dishonest**
Efficient	7	6	5	4	3	2	1	**Inefficient**

Regarding the sense of school community statistically significant differences emerge in all domains of the scale (see table 13), namely the sub-dimensions “Membership” (p=.002), “Emotional connection” (p=<.001), “Opportunities” (p=<.001), as well as in the sense of general school community (p=<.001). As regards the effect size, medium-high coefficients were found for “Opportunities” and “General sense of school community”. Medium coefficients were found for the sub-dimensions of “Emotional connection” and “Membership”.

Table 13: SoC Scale’s results of paired samples t-test

Dimension	**PRE N = 44**		**POST N = 44**		***p***	**Cohen’s d**
	M	**DS**	**M**	**DS**		
Membership	9.30	3.18	10.52	2.00	.002	0.45
Emotional connection	9.95	3.08	11.39	2.36	<.001	0.52
Opportunities	7.07	1.97	8.50	1.43	<.001	0.83

General sense of school community	26.32	6.25	30.41	4.13	<.001	0.77

As can be seen from the table 14, after completing the programme, students showed improvements in the WB-Pro dimensions of competence (p=0.13), meaning (p=.017), optimism (p=.049), vitality (p=.050) and emotional stability (p=.007). The resilience dimension is just above significance (p=.053). The effect size analysis shows that the impact is generally small.

Table 14: WB-Pro Scale's results of paired samples t-test

Dimension	**PRE N = 44**		**POST N = 44**		***p***	**Cohen's d**
	M	**DS**	**M**	**DS**		
Autonomy	16.50	6.01	17.98	6.09	.075	0.24
Competence	16.93	5.19	18.84	4.99	.013	0.37
Empathy	25.45	6.73	25.84	6.74	.650	0.05
Engagement	17.19	5.03	18.59	5.69	.098	0.26
Meaning	16.55	6.18	18.30	5.84	.017	0.29
Optimism	14.41	6.59	15.93	6.51	.049	0.23
Resilience	14.23	6.05	15.59	6.41	.053	0.21
Vitality	15.45	5.68	16.86	5.77	.050	0.24
Clear thinking	24.16	6.63	25.05	6.16	.320	0.13
Emotional stability	12.95	5.98	15.07	5.20	.007	0.37
Positive emotion	16.14	6.72	16.86	5.22	.333	0.11
Positive relations	26.75	6.16	28.30	5.94	.075	0.25
Pro-social behaviour	22.81	4.20	22.55	4.71	.634	0.05
Self-acceptance	20.95	7.76	21.70	7.55	.411	0.09
Self-esteem	16.61	6.67	17.86	5.87	.094	0.19

2.3.2. Qualitative analysis

Participants were asked a few questions at the beginning and end of the programme to assess its effectiveness using a qualitative procedure.

About the question "Justice for me is…" the frequency analysis showed that the most frequent answers referred to the "respect for State rules and laws" (18), the concept of "fairness" (15), emphasising aspects such as equality, protection/respect/recognition of rights, freedom; "punishment" (3); "respect to the other" (2); "offender rehabilitation/treatment" (1). In the post-test, the frequency analysis showed that the most frequent answers were "Respect for the rules and laws of the State" (18); "an opportunity for the victim and the perpetrator to confront each other and repair the harm done/suffered"

(13); “fairness” (8); “punishment” (1). Table 15 summarises the results of the frequency analysis.

The answers to the question “When people violate the rules one should...?” in the pre-test were “punish” (29), “re-educate” (12) and “punish and re-educate” (3). In the post-test the answers were “punish” (25), “accountability” (16), “re-educate” (2) and “Punish and re-educate” (1). Table 16 summarises the results of the frequency analysis.

To the question “People who suffer injustice/wrongdoing/crime need...?”, the answers in the pre-test were “support (financial, psychological, emotional, legal, social)” (24), “justice (formal)” (13), “compensation” (3) and “protection and guarantee from the State” (2). Two participants did not answer the question. In the post-test the answers were “support (financial, psychological, emotional, legal, social)” (36), “justice (formal)” (6), “compensation” (2). Table 17 summarises the results of the frequency analysis.

To the question “People who are perpetrators of injustice/wrongdoing/crime need...?”, the answers in the pre-test were “re-education/rehabilitation/treatment” (31) and “punishment” (13). The answers in the post-test were “accountability” (17), “re-education/rehabilitation/treatment” (11), “punishment” (10) and “punishment and re-education/rehabilitation/treatment” (6). Table 18 summarises the results of the frequency analysis.

Finally, in the pre-test the answers to the question “Those who commit an injustice/wrongdoing/offence deserve...?” were “punishment” (31), “punishment and re-education” (9) and “re-education/rehabilitation/treatment” (9). The answers in the post-test were “punishment” (22), “punishment and re-education” (9), “accountability” (8), “punishment proportionate with the seriousness of the offence” (4) and “re-education/rehabilitation/treatment” (1). Table 19 summarises the results of the frequency analysis.

Table 15: “For me justice is…”

PRE-TEST			**POST-TEST**		
Answer	**Frequency**	**Percent**	**Answer**	**Frequency**	**Percent**
Respect to the other	2	4.5	Respect to the other	4	9.1
Fairness	15	34.1	Fairness	8	18.2
Offender rehabilitation/treatment	1	2.3			
Respect for the rules and laws of the State	18	40.9	Respect for the rules and laws of the State	18	40.9
Punishment	3	6.8	Punishment	1	2.3

			An opportunity for the victim and the perpetrator to confront each other and repair the harm done/suffered	13	29.5

Table 16: "When people violate the rules one should...?"

PRE-TEST			POST-TEST		
Answers	**Frequency**	**Percent**	**Answers**	**Frequency**	**Percent**
Punish	29	65.9	Punish	25	56.8
Re-educate	12	27.3	Re-educate	2	4.5
Punish and re-educate	3	6.8	Punish and re-educate	1	2.3
			Accountability	16	36.4

Table 17: "People who suffer injustice/wrongdoing/crime need...?"

PRE-TEST			POST-TEST		
Answers	**Frequency**	**Percent**	**Answers**	**Frequency**	**Percent**
Support (financial, psychological, emotional, legal, social)	24	54.5	Support (financial, psychological, emotional, legal, social)	36	81.8
Justice	13	29.5	Justice	6	13.6
Compensation	3	6.8	Compensation	2	4.5
Protection and guarantees from the state	2	4.5			
No answer	2	4.5			

Table 18: "People who are perpetrators of injustice/wrongdoing/crime need...?"

PRE-TEST			POST-TEST		
Answers	**Frequency**	**Percent**	**Answers**	**Frequency**	**Percent**
Re-education/rehabilitation /treatment	31	70.5	Re-education/rehabilitation/treatment	11	25.0
Punishment	13	29.5	Punishment	10	22.7
			Punishment and re-education	6	13.6
			Accountability	17	38.6

Table 19: "Those who commit an injustice/wrongdoing/offence deserve...?"

PRE-TEST			POST-TEST		
Answers	**Frequency**	**Percent**	**Answers**	**Frequency**	**Percent**
Re-education/rehabilitation/treatment	4	9.1	Re-education/rehabilitation /treatment	1	2.3
Punishment	31	70.5	Punishment	22	50.0
Punishment and re-education	9	20.5	Punishment and re-education	9	20.5
			Accountability	8	18.2
			Punishment proportionate to the seriousness of the crime	4	9.1

In response to the question “What do you think you have understood about restorative justice?”, 38.6% (17) of participants stated “the importance of listening to the points of view of those involved in an injury/crime/conflict”, 15.9% (7) that restorative justice is “a way to heal relationships broken by an harm/crime”, 9.1% (4) stated that restorative justice is “an approach that allows perpetrators to understand the harm caused from the point of view of its consequences”, 6.8% (3) stated that restorative justice is “a way for those involved to build a different and better future”, 4.5% (2) that restorative justice is “an alternative approach to managing and dealing with conflicts”, a further 4.5% (2) that it is “a new vision of justice” and another 4.5% (2) that it is “a way for the victim to find peace and move on”. Finally, 15.9% (7) did not answer the question.

When asked “What aspect of the restorative approach do you feel closest to in terms of your own feelings and actions?”, 43.2% (19) responded “the importance of listening to the points of view of others, even if they are far from our own”, 15.9% (7) responded “punishment is not a fair and useful way to respond to people's behaviour”, 9.1% (4) responded “the importance of dialogue” and a further 9.1% (7) “the ability to forgive”. Finally, 10 people (22.7%) did not answer the question.

When asked “What do you feel is far from your way of feeling and acting in the restorative approach?”, 22.73% (10) answered “the possibility for a victim and a perpetrator to talk to each other”, 18.18% (8) “believing in the possibility of a perpetrator changing”, 18.18% (8) “understanding the reasons behind a crime” and 18.18% (8) answered “forgiving”. Finally, 10 people (22.73%) did not answer the question.

When asked “What do you think you have learned from this experience?”, 34.1% (15) answered “the importance of listening to all points of view, even if they are different or distant from our own, and respecting them”, 22.7% (10) answered “to be more empathetic”, 13.6% (6) answered “the importance of respecting others”, 11.4% (5) “the importance of offering a second chance if you make a mistake”, 9.1% (4) “the importance of helping others even when they make mistakes, without prejudice” and a further 9.1% (4) “the importance of dialogue, in all contexts of our lives”.

When asked “What value did this course have for you?”, 56.8% (25) answered “personal growth”, 31.8% (14) “a change of perspective” and finally 11.4% (5) said “moral value”.

Finally, when asked “How do you think this approach could be incorporated into the school community?”, 56.8% (25) answered “by continuing to promote this training course, also to other classes/the whole school”, 27.3% (12) answered “as an alternative way of managing and responding to harmful behaviour at school” and 9.1% (4) answered “as a path of dialogue between students and teachers”. Finally, 6.8% (3) did not answer the question.

2.4. Discussion

The analysis that follows examines the outcomes of the restorative justice training programme through both quantitative and qualitative perspectives. The results obtained from the pre–post evaluation provide valuable insights into the potential impact of restorative education programmes in school contexts. Overall, the findings indicate that participation in the training and awareness-raising pathway produced positive effects, particularly in terms of psychological well-being and sense of school community.

The research hypothesis was that participants in the training group would show a significant increase in psychological well-being levels, particularly in the dimensions of competence, empathy, commitment, positive relationships and prosocial behaviour. This hypothesis was partially confirmed, but additional important results emerged that were not initially anticipated. Specifically, improvements emerged in several dimensions of the WB-Pro scale (Scalas et al., 2023), such as competence, meaning, optimism, vitality, and emotional stability. These results suggest that the programme may have contributed to enhancing students perceived self-efficacy and ability to attribute a sense of purpose to their school experience, as well as to promoting more adaptive emotional regulation strategies. Such outcomes are consistent with previous research showing that interventions based on restorative principles—such as empathy, shared responsibility, and community participation—can foster personal growth, resilience, and well-being (Wachtel, 2016; Morrison, 2007).

About the sense of community, the expectation was an increase in the dimensions of membership and emotional connection. However, the results show statistically significant increases in all dimensions, including the dimension of opportunity, which was not included in the research hypothesis. These results highlight the central role of restorative approaches in strengthening relational bonds within the school environment, promoting inclusion, trust, and a sense of shared responsibility. Feeling part of a cohesive and participatory community is a key protective factor for students' psychological adjustment and academic engagement (Battistich et al., 1997; McCluskey et al., 2008).

Taken together, these findings suggest that restorative education pathways can be effective in enhancing students' psychological well-being and sense of belonging to the school community.

About restorative attitudes, the results show that the programme promoted fundamental values of respect, empathy and responsibility. Therefore, the research hypothesis (H2) is partially confirmed. Although these results should be interpreted with caution, the graphical analysis of the average responses on the scale shows an overall shift in responses towards

the more positive end of the scale from the pre-test to the post-test. This result is consistent with both the quantitative results and the programme's objectives, indicating that the training experience may have fostered greater openness towards perspectives of responsibility, respect and empathy. Although no definitive conclusions can be drawn, given the size of the sample and the limitations of the measurement, the observed trend supports the hypothesis that educational programmes focused on restorative justice can have a positive impact on students' attitudes, contributing to the spread of a more empathetic, inclusive and relationship-oriented school culture.

These results, therefore, offer preliminary evidence of the educational value of restorative practices in education and encourage further investigation through studies with more robust designs and larger samples. Indeed, future research could investigate the long-term effects of such interventions.

The qualitative analysis of the open-ended responses provided a deeper understanding of how students internalised the principles of restorative justice at the end of the training course. In relation to the question “Justice for me is...”, the pre-test data show a predominantly retributive and normative conception of justice, centred on respect for the law and the principle of formal equity. After the course, while the reference to rules remains salient, a more relational and restorative vision emerges, in which justice is understood as an opportunity for the victim and perpetrator to meet and discuss the matter to repair the harm. This shift indicates the assimilation of the core values of the restorative paradigm, which recognizes justice as a process of mutual recognition and shared responsibility (Zehr, 2002; Braithwaite, 2002; Van Ness et al., 2022). In relation to the question “Justice for me is...”, the pre-test data show a predominantly retributive and normative conception of justice, centred on respect for the law and the principle of formal equity. After the course, while the reference to rules remains salient, a more relational and restorative vision emerges, in which justice is understood as an opportunity for the victim and perpetrator to meet and discuss the matter to repair the harm. This shift indicates the assimilation of the core values of the restorative paradigm, which recognizes justice as a process of mutual recognition and shared responsibility (Zehr, 2002; Braithwaite, 2002; Van Ness et al., 2022). When asked ‘When people violate the rules one should...’, the initial prevalence of the answer ‘punish’ gradually gives way to the category of accountability, an expression of a more empowering and transformative approach. This change suggests a transition from the language of guilt to that of responsibility (Llewellyn & Howse, 1999), consistent with the restorative perspective that aims to understand harm and rebuild social bonds (Morrison, 2007). About the needs of victims, a conceptual evolution can also be observed: justice is no longer associated

primarily with punishment or compensation, but with the need for emotional, psychological, and relational support. This highlights the internalization of a vision of justice as a process of healing and recognition, rather than mere punishment (Zehr, 2015; Pali & Maglione, 2021). At the same time, participants show a change in the way they view perpetrators of injustice: from individuals to be punished or re-educated to individuals who must take responsibility for their actions and commit to a path of reparation. The emergence of the category of "accountability" reflects a greater understanding of the educational and transformative value of responsibility (Braithwaite, 2010). Finally, the response to the question 'Those who commit an offence deserve...?' also reflects a shift from an absolute punitive logic to a more proportionate and reflective conception of punishment, in which punishment is seen as part of a broader process of reworking and reparation. Overall, the qualitative results indicate that the training course fostered a change in cognition and values, orienting participants towards a more relational, empathetic, and responsible conception of justice. This transformation confirms the educational and cultural potential of restorative justice, which can promote a new sensitivity among young people towards caring for relationships and shared responsibility (EFRJ, 2021).

In line with what has been argued in the literature (Zehr, 2002; Llewellyn & Howse, 1999), the importance attributed to listening and recognising different points of view as fundamental elements for conflict management and relationship rebuilding emerged strongly. This focus on dialogue and communication reflects the relational and participatory nature of the restorative approach, in which dialogue between the parties replaces the punitive logic with that of mutual recognition (McCluskey et al., 2008; Morrison, 2007).

Alongside this, participants expressed an understanding of restorative justice as an opportunity for healing and rebuilding harmed relationships, as well as a space in which perpetrators and victims can understand the consequences of the harm and take responsibility in a constructive way (Van Ness et al., 2022). In this sense, the training experience seems to have fostered a more empathetic and humanising view of justice, consistent with the founding principles of the restorative paradigm (Braithwaite, 2002; Zehr, 2015).

However, some resistance to specific aspects of the approach, such as the possibility of direct contact between perpetrator and victim or trust in the perpetrator's capacity for change, suggests the persistence of cultural patterns attributable to a more retributive conception of justice. These results are consistent with what has been observed in the literature, where the transition from a punitive to a restorative mindset is described as a gradual process that requires time, reflection and collective discussion (Pali & Maglione, 2021; Marder, 2018).

From an educational point of view, participants perceived the programme as an experience of personal growth and change of perspective, capable of broadening their awareness of themselves and their relationships with others. This confirms the transformative potential of restorative justice education, which can promote socio-emotional skills such as empathy, respect and responsibility (Riestenberg, 2012; Morrison, 2013). Furthermore, the reflections that emerged suggest an interest in the stable integration of restorative practices within the school community, in line with European and international recommendations promoting their adoption as an educational and relational approach (Council of Europe, 2018; EFRJ, 2021).

Overall, the qualitative results indicate that the training contributed not only to developing an understanding of the restorative justice paradigm, but also to stimulating a value-based and emotional reflection on the themes of respect, listening and shared responsibility. While highlighting some difficulties in overcoming traditional patterns, the data show the emergence of a new sensitivity, oriented towards reparation and the care of relationships, which represents an important starting point for promoting a culture of restorative justice within schools.

However, this study has some limitations. One of the main ones is the absence of a control group. Nevertheless, to limit the effect of possible distortions and ensure the internal validity of the study, several measures were taken, such as not allowing too much time to elapse between the pre-test and post-test and using validated instruments. In addition, self-assessment measures were used, which may affect the validity of the study in terms of data reliability. Furthermore, the sample is small and comes from only one Italian region, which limits the generalisability of the results.

3. Concluding thoughts, limitations and future implications

The training programme on restorative justice and restorative practices proved to be a meaningful and effective educational experience. The results, both quantitative and qualitative, can suggest that restorative education can enhance students' psychological well-being and strengthen their sense of belonging to the school community, while also fostering the acquisition of core restorative values such as empathy, respect, and responsibility.

Beyond measurable outcomes, the experience promoted a process of personal and relational growth, encouraging participants to adopt more reflective and dialogical approaches to conflict and harm. At the same time, the persistence of some resistance to key restorative principles, such as direct encounters between victims and offenders or belief in the

offender's capacity for change, highlights the need for longer, more integrated interventions capable of supporting a gradual shift from punitive to restorative mindsets.

The results of this study should be read with due caution as they have some limitations. Preliminarily, the sample is small and was administered to a convenience sample and this limits the generabilization of the results. Also, the control group is missing. Geographical origin (students living in northern Sardinia and therefore not evenly distributed in the different parts of the country) and cultural influence and prejudices may have influenced the results. Additionally, self-report measures were used that may have influenced the validity of the study in terms of data reliability. For this reason, longitudinal studies will be needed in future research on this topic.

Despite these limitations, the proposed experiment can confirm the potential of schools as spaces for the dissemination of restorative culture. Incorporating restorative practices into educational settings can contribute not only to conflict management, but also to building inclusive, participatory, and supportive communities. Future research and practice should therefore focus on consolidating these pathways, assessing their long-term impact, and promoting their integration into educational policies and institutional frameworks.

Conclusion

Restorative justice is a paradigm that cannot be identified with a specific programme or field of application (Johnstone, 2014; Johnstone & Van Ness, 2006; Patrizi, 2024; Wright, 2002; Zehr, 2002), as it represents a cross-cutting approach that can be applied in different contexts and for different purposes. Moreover, within the ristorative justice paradigm, there are different programmes that vary according to the people involved and the context in which they are applied. These can be: family group conference, restorative conference, victim-offender mediation (VOM), community-building circles.

Regarding issues of criminal relevance, restorative justice is not necessarily the other pole of retributive justice, although the two paradigms represent different systems in terms of the meaning they attach to crime and consequently in the goals they pursue in responding to it (Johnstone, 2014; McCold & Wachtel, 2003; Patrizi, 2024; Wright, 2002; Zehr, 2005). Restorative justice, in fact, is normative in nature and sees crime as a violation of state law because of which responsibility for the act is determined in terms of guilt and the respective punishment is imposed. For restorative justice, the offence is seen as a harm caused and suffered by the victim (not by the state) and emphasizes repairing the harm as a means of restoring justice, relational balance, and trust in bonds, taking care of all parties affected by the harm (victims, perpetrators, community), since, for restorative justice, it is not enough to punish the offence to achieve these goals. Therefore, it is possible, and it would be desirable, for both to dialogue together so that their mutual diversities and specificities are a strength that enables them to build systemic responses through integrated pathways, attentive and capable of welcoming/taking care of all the needs of those affected by the crime/harm. In fact, the most recent research in this field (Armstrong, 2012; Johnstone, 2014; Carroll & Warner, 2014; Hechler et al., 2023; Shapland et al., 2011; Waquant, 2014; Wood, 2015) shows that restorative justice and restorative processes represent a space for listening and responding to needs that have remained unheard and/or unreceived by traditional justice systems, and victims and offenders who participate in restorative processes experience justice in a much more satisfying and meaningful way than those experienced in court. For example, with regard to victims, restorative processes have been shown to achieve at least 85% satisfaction among victims (Armstrong, 2012; Chapman, 2024; Hechler et al., 2023; Laxminarayan, 2011; Shapland et al., 2011; Wallace & Wylie, 2013) and reduce their fear of suffering further harm (Armstrong, 2012; Hechler et al., 2023; Strang, 2002;Van Camp, 2017; Zehr, 2005) due to the opportunity they are given to tell the truth about what happened, to ask why, and to make known the consequences of the harm they have suffered. Thus, restorative processes can help the offender to take responsibility for his or her actions in

terms of harm and consequences on the victim, and to change with a view to reintegration into the community. In this sense, restorative processes may also be a protective factor with respect to the containment of the risk of reoffending, as they may help to change the offender's perspective, discourage crime (Latimer et al., 2005; Lauwaert & Aertsen, 2015; Robinson and Shapland, 2008) and contribute to the reduction of reoffending rates and thus also of incarceration levels (Chapman, 2024; Johnstone, 2014; Latimer et al., 2005; Shapland & Robinson, 2011; Sliva, 2018).

The research presented in this thesis was developed through an integrated approach, in which theoretical reflection and empirical investigation were intertwined, with the aim of constructing, exploring and validating the construct of restorative attitude. In particular, the research followed four main lines: (1) providing an overview of the scientific literature on the application of restorative justice and its practices through two literature reviews in the school and prison contexts; (2) the theoretical conceptualisation of restorative attitudes and their place in the field of psychological sciences and restorative justice; (3) the construction and psychometric validation of a scale to measure the construct; (4) the application of a restorative justice education programme in schools, aimed at assessing its impact in terms of well-being, sense of community, the promotion of a restorative attitude and internalisation of restorative values and principles. The intent was twofold: on the one hand, to propose a theoretical model that would allow us to understand how people interpret and react to situations of harm, conflict or injustice; on the other hand, to translate this model into empirical tools and educational programmes capable of promoting a relational culture based on responsibility, respect, empathy and justice. The latter was achieved based on the results of literature reviews.

The work about the restorative attitude consisted of a series of qualitative and quantitative studies that progressively refined the understanding of the construct. The first, exploratory phase outlined the main dimensions of the restorative attitude based on the participants' representations of the meaning of justice and ways of responding to injustice. Four key dimensions emerged from this phase — responsibility, respect, sense of justice and empathy — which were subsequently expanded to five (including flexibility/open-mindedness) thanks to the results of exploratory and confirmatory factor analyses. The construction and validation of the Restorative Attitude Scale represented a crucial step in the process. The work was divided into a series of qualitative and quantitative studies. The first, exploratory phase allowed us to outline the main dimensions of restorative attitudes based on participants' representations of the meaning of justice and ways of responding to injustice. Four key dimensions emerged from this phase: responsibility, respect, sense of justice, and

empathy. Subsequently, these dimensions were expanded to five (including flexibility/open-mindedness) thanks to the results of exploratory and confirmatory factor analyses. These results offer an initial empirical validation of the construct's structure, laying the foundations for further applications and insights.

In terms of application, the research involved the implementation of a restorative justice education programme in two secondary schools in Sardinia. The intervention aimed to promote not only theoretical knowledge of the restorative paradigm among participants, but also relational and socio-emotional skills, through experiential and participatory activities, such as restorative circles. The results of the project indicate that training courses inspired by restorative justice can have a positive impact on individual well-being and the sense of community in schools, as well as promoting a restorative attitude among students. Indeed, pre- and post-test analyses showed positive effects in several areas of psychological well-being (Scalas et al., 2023), particularly competence, meaning, optimism, vitality and emotional stability. These results suggest that participation in the programme fostered greater self-awareness, a more positive perception of one's own resources and a deeper connection with the school environment. The most consistent improvement was in the sense of school community (Prati et al., 2017), which showed significant increases in all its dimensions: belonging, emotional connection, opportunity and overall cohesion. The training programme showed a positive trend in strengthening these dimensions, both through the analysis of qualitative data and through the shift in the average scores on the scale developed in this study. This indicates that it is possible to intervene in a targeted manner on attitudes and encourage greater openness towards practices of dialogue, empowerment and reconciliation. These results have important implications both theoretically and practically: confirmation of the possible existence and measurability of the construct, offering a new psychological variable on which to develop research; showing how a restorative attitude can be promoted through restorative justice education programmes. Overall, the restorative attitude emerges as a transformative social skill, capable of influencing not only the way in which one responds to offence, but also the way in which one recognises the other as part of a bond worthy of being repaired and cherished.

This result confirms the findings of numerous international studies (Morrison, 2007; Riestenberg, 2012; Wachtel, 2016), according to which restorative practices, based on listening, dialogue and shared responsibility, can strengthen social bonds and promote an inclusive and participatory climate. In this sense, the school emerges as a privileged context for the construction of a restorative culture, in which conflict management becomes an opportunity for growth and learning, rather than punishment or exclusion. The qualitative

results obtained from the analysis of open-ended responses offer further food for thought. The participants' words testify to a process of internalisation of restorative principles, centred on the value of listening, understanding different points of view and shared responsibility. Many students described restorative justice to rebuild harmed relationships, understand the consequences of their actions, and offer a "second chance". These representations confirm the transformative nature of the restorative paradigm, capable of generating changes in the perception of oneself and others (Van Ness et al., 2022; Zehr, 2002). However, the emergence of some resistance, such as the difficulty in accepting direct confrontation between victim and perpetrator or trust in the possibility of change on the part of the offender, suggests the persistence of retributive cultural models, still deeply rooted in collective thinking. As Pali and Maglione (2021) observe, the transition to a genuinely restorative approach cannot be reduced to the adoption of new techniques, but requires a profound change in mentality, involving beliefs, emotions and social representations.

On a theoretical level, the work offers an original contribution to the literature, introducing the concept of restorative attitude as a new psychological construct that is measurable and applicable to different contexts. The scale developed can be used in future research to investigate the relationship between restorative orientation, prosocial behaviours and perceived justice processes.

On an applied level, the research highlights the importance of training as a lever for cultural change. Education in restorative justice is, in fact, a powerful tool for promoting socio-emotional skills and relational values, in line with the latest international recommendations (Council of Europe, 2018; EFRJ, 2021).

Finally, on a cultural and social level, this research invites us to consider restorative justice as a philosophy of coexistence and a form of relational citizenship. Promoting a "restorative mindset", based on empathy, respect and shared responsibility, means fostering the construction of more just, inclusive and supportive communities (Braithwaite, 2002; Zehr, 2015).

From this perspective, restorative justice is not only a response to conflict, but a worldview, a way of thinking and being in relationships. As Zehr (2002) states, "doing justice means putting things right, but also caring for the people and bonds that give meaning to our humanity". This research, therefore, is not limited to validating a model or measuring a construct: it proposes a broader reflection on the meaning of justice and the possibility of transforming human relationships through listening, responsibility and reparation. The hope is that the results presented here will contribute to spreading the culture of restorative justice,

both in scientific research and in educational and social contexts, guiding future generations towards a way of being and living based on mutual care and justice as a relationship.

Appendix 1

Table A1. Academic scientific literature excluded from the systematic review at school (*n*=15).

First author, year	Study design	Population	Intervention	Comparison	Outcomes
Darling-Hammond, 2020	Quantitative research review (regression analyses, nonparametric models, tests, and analyses of variance) and literature review	US K–12 schools	Restorative justice and restorative practices as an alternative school disciplinary model	traditional school system	Reduction in misconduct (e.g., bullying); less use of exclusionary disciplinary responses (e.g., suspensions, expulsions); less unequal disciplinary treatment; higher school attendance; improvement of the school climate and safety; better academic results
Drewery, 2016	Theoretical article	School	Restorative justice practices as an instrument of social development	restorative justice practices as an instrument of behaviour management practice	Reflections on social development through restorative justice in New Zealand schools
González et al., 2019	Theoretical article	School	Restorative justice as a school reform strategy	punitive, exclusionary, and zero-tolerance approaches (e.g., suspensions, expulsions)	Reflections on exclusionary school discipline (ESD) as a question of health justice and on the importance of implementing school restorative justice practices to address ESD
Katic et al., 2020	Systematic literature review of peer-reviewed studies	Elementary, middle and high school students and teachers	Restorative conversations, circles, conferences, and peer mediation	exclusionary and punitive disciplinary policies (i.e., zero-tolerance policies)	Improved social skills (e.g., empathy, awareness, and accountability); prosocial behaviour; positive school climate and social relationships between teachers and students and peers; problem-solving strategies; conflict management; reduction in bullying
Koltz et al., 2020	Literature review	Elementary, middle, and high schools	Use of picture books to support social and emotional learning via RJ conversations and practices	traditional school system and practices	Improved social skills (e.g., empathy, awareness, and accountability); improved emotional skills, attitudes, academic performance; prosocial and positive behaviour and building of safe and engaging classroom communities; positive school climate and social relationships; conflict and behaviour management;

					boosted gender equality and understanding of different individuals and cultures
Lustick, 2017	Theoretical article	School	Means of implementing models of positive discipline to counter racism and foster intercultural understanding	not available	The current literature on positive discipline fails to critically discuss issues of race and racism while calling for actions that reduce disciplinary disparity between students of different races; discussion of the implications and proposal of new criteria for policy, practice, and evaluation of positive discipline
Mayworm et al., 2016	Literature review	School	Implementation of a multilevel model of professional development to build teachers' competences with respect to restorative justice and practices	traditional school system	Need for more research evaluating the impact of RJ in schools; promotion of alternative and multilevel methods of managing behavioural problems; improved social and emotional skills (e.g., empathy, awareness, and accountability); promotion of multilevel teacher training on RJ; promotion of school counseling for collaborative problem solving; development of a model of professional development of teachers to promote the implementation of RJ in school
Oxley et al., 2021	Theoretical article	School	Analysis and comparison between restorative practices (RP), positive behavioural intervention and support (PBIS), and collaborative and proactive solutions (CPS) to manage behaviour in the classroom and promote social justice	exclusionary and punitive disciplinary policies (i.e., zero-tolerance policies)	Collaborative approaches to problem solving; reduction in or elimination of traditional punishments; reduction in school exclusion and inequality based on gender, race, and socioeconomic status; improved social and emotional skills (e.g., empathy, awareness, and accountability); promotion of equity; prosocial and positive behaviour; positive social relationships; restorative conferences to address serious behavioural incidents; lack of RJ training and preparation of teachers; most used RP in the UK; RP take time to be incorporated into the school system compared to the other approaches

Rigby, 2014	Literature review	1378 primary and secondary schools in England	Effectiveness of restorative practices in dealing with cases of school bullying	"traditional" disciplinary practices oriented towards punitive approaches	Absence of coercion; proactive high-level conflict management; active involvement in the process of solving bully/victim problems
Song et al., 2016	Theoretical article	School	RJ within an ecological framework	not available	Future directions for research, training, and practice
Song et al., 2020	Systematic literature review	School	Restorative justice to promote anti-racism and social justice	not available	Importance of training for all school staff; importance of the support of external RJ professionals; promotion of a restorative peer culture to promote diversity and inclusion and prevent bullying; restorative practices in the classroom to create planned and joint actions to deal with, manage, and respond to conflicts and incidents; RJ schools can integrate into the approach racial justice education through the integration of specific contents and strategies; RJ to promote positive relationships, empowerment, and collaboration; RJ as an important predictor of improving school–family collaboration (even though there is still a lack of research); RJ allows schools to make changes in the whole system of thought, supporting the development of a fair and respectful school culture
Stewart Kline, 2016	Literature review	Students	Restorative approach and restorative practices (e.g., restorative conferences) as a disciplinary practice in school	exclusionary disciplinary policies (i.e., zero-tolerance policies)	Inclusive culture and reduction in inequality; self-awareness; development of skills for peaceful conflict resolution; improvement of positive relationships between peers and between peers and teachers; reduction in accidents, disciplinary postponements, risky behaviours, and school crimes; reduction in the need for extracurricular support

Vaandering, 2010	Theoretical article	School	Reflection on the critical theory applied to restorative practices in education	not available	Reflection on the current understanding, implementation, and sustainability of RJ practice in schools and more generally in education; the importance of understanding the restorative approach as an important factor of cultural transformation in the school and not just as practices for dealing with and managing conflicts and harmful behaviours
Velez et al., 2020	Theoretical article	School	Review of the current literature on restorative practices as an alternative approach to managing behavioural problems	traditional school system and approach	Safer schools; greater school connection; lower rates of suspensions and expulsions; work of psychologists fundamental for the theoretical, practical, and formative development as well as for the evaluation of RJ; inclusive culture and reduction in inequality; promotion of communication; improvement of positive relationships between peers and between peers and teachers; community-building circles to foster trust and develop bonds; reactive circles to tackle harm; restorative conferences to deal with serious accidents; improved social and emotional skills (e.g., empathy, awareness, accountability, responsibility)
Weber et al., 2020	Systematic review	34 studies	Restorative practices to reduce conflicts at school	traditional approach	Positive, safe, inclusive, and equitable school climate; development of social skills (e.g., empathy, awareness, responsibility, accountability); positive relationship between teachers and students and peers; reduction in health risk behaviours (smoking; substance use; dangerous sexual intercourse); decrease in suspension rates; lower likelihood of receiving disciplinary sanctions

Appendix 2

Table A2. Characteristics of the included studies in systematic review at school (*n*=34).

First author, year	Study design	Population	Intervention	Comparison	Outcomes

Acosta et al., 2019	Randomized controlled trial (RCT)	2771 students at 13 middle schools	Restorative practices to promote positive youth development paths and counter bullying and cyberbullying	traditional practices	Improvement of the positive school climate; peer attachment; social skills; reduction in victimization of bullying and cyberbullying; more positive behaviours
Ahmed et al., 2012	Follow-up survey	335 children from 32 public and private schools in Canberra, Australia	Restorative justice program to promote shame management skills and prevent school bullying	traditional behavioural problem management strategies (exclusionary and punitive disciplinary policies)	Increased shame management skills; development of reflective thinking; effective shame management responses; development of alternative conflict resolution practices
Anyon et al., 2016	Correlational study	9921 students from 180 Denver public schools	Restorative interventions as a response and intervention for disciplinary problems at school	traditional disciplinary practices oriented towards punitive and exclusionary approaches	Highlighting of disciplinary disparities; significant association between participation in restorative justice interventions and positive results of the discipline; reduction in disciplinary sanctions
Bonell et al., 2014	Randomized controlled trial (RCT)	students, school teachers and teaching assistants from 40 English secondary schools	Restorative approach implemented throughout the school to counter and manage incorrect behaviour (e.g., bullying, aggression) through the formation of school action groups and external facilitation, staff training, and promotion of a new curriculum on social and emotional skills	normal practice	Reduction in bullying and aggression; reduction in health risk outcomes (e.g., substance use); promotion of mental health, emotional well-being, and QoL; reduction in NHS and social costs (e.g., costs of the justice system); increased access to restorative training; improved school environment; new opportunities for learning; more self-efficacy
Bonell et al., 2017	Updates to the original trial protocol [24]	students, school teachers and teaching assistants from 40 English secondary schools	Restorative approach implemented throughout the school to counter and manage incorrect behaviour (e.g., bullying, aggression) through the formation of school action groups and external facilitation, staff training, and promotion of a new curriculum on social and emotional skills	normal practice	Reduction in bullying and aggression; reduction in healthrisk outcomes (e.g., substance use); promotion of mental health, emotional well-being, and QoL; reduction in NHS and social costs (e.g., costs of the justice system); increased access to restorative training; improved school environment; new opportunities for learning; more self-efficacy

Bonell et al., 2018	Randomized controlled trial (RCT)	students, schoolteachers and teaching assistants from 40 English secondary schools	Whole-school restorative approach to address bullying and aggression, involving school action group formation and external facilitation; staff training in restorative practices; a new social and emotional skills curriculum	normal practice	Improved social and emotional skills (e.g., empathy, awareness, and accountability); less bullying and aggression; reduction in student reports of bullying victimization; reduction in health risk behaviours (smoking; substance use, such as alcohol and drugs; dangerous sexual intercourse); reduction in the use of NHS services; better quality of life; greater emotional well-being; lower psychological difficulties
Farr et al., 2020	Single-case study	principal of one urban elementary school with 800 students	Restorative practices as a disciplinary model and practices in school	exclusionary and punitive disciplinary policies	Underestimation of the complexity of implementing restorative justice in schools with members of different races; need to evaluate the contextual characteristics of the school/community; importance of principal leadership in creating safe learning communities and school–community–family ties; importance of working together with teachers and families
Gilzene, 2021	Single-case study	principal of one high school with 1400 students	Restorative justice and restorative practices as an alternative school disciplinary strategy	traditional behavioural problem management strategies (exclusionary and punitive disciplinary policies)	Difficulty and complexity in implementing restorative justice; importance of creating an action plan shared by the entire school; importance of training on RJ; reduction in accidents, disciplinary postponements, and school crimes; importance of context analysis
González et al., 2018	Single-case study design	200 students from one urban high school	Inclusion of restorative approaches into the academic curriculum	traditional authoritarian and punitive school system	Development of non-hierarchical leadership; promotion of participatory and co-creative decision-making processes between the students and the school staff; improvement of positive relationships; greater sense of membership; human agency and resilience; promotion of positive social and emotional skills

Gregory et al., 2015	Qualitative study (surveys, questionnaires, school data analysis)	412 students from 29 high schools	Restorative practices to promote positive relationships between teachers and students of all racial and ethnic groups	traditional school system	More equitable disciplinary practices; supportive and fair school climate; better student experience in the classroom and at school; greater respect perceived by students than their teachers; less use of disciplinary referrals for misconduct between racial and ethnic groups; positive relationships between teachers and students and peers
Gregory et al., 2021	Qualitative research design (interviews)	18 school-based RP practitioners and principals from 13 schools in an urban district (three high schools, two combined schools, five middle schools, three elementary schools)	Restorative practices to enhance the skills of school staff and students and support for multilevel restorative practices	traditional school system	Identification of 12 indicators of restorative practices implementation; integration of an RP mindset into all aspects of the school; supportive and fair school climate; administrative support as a key to advancing schoolwide reform and restorative initiatives; development of alternative methods to the exclusionary discipline and conflict management; capacity building of school staff, students, and families; promotion of equity and social justice; inclusion of family and community members in school transition to PR
Green et al., 2019	Randomized controlled trial (RCT) (interviews, questionnaires, triangulation of data)	12 middle schools	Restorative practices (circles, restorative conversation, restorative mediation, restorative conferences) as an alternative disciplinary practice in school	exclusionary and punitive disciplinary policies (i.e., zero tolerance-policies)	Reduction in expulsions, suspensions, truancy, and bullying; promotion of a sense of safety at school; increased teacher support; reduction in racial and socioeconomic disparities
Gwathney, 2021	Qualitative case study	one adolescent from one high school	Restorative justice and practices to decrease racial disparities in zero-tolerance school suspensions	exclusionary and punitive disciplinary policies (i.e., zero-tolerance policies)	Future of presentations, increased sense of academic value and community support; development of the ability to recognize the experience and reality of marginalized student groups
Hashim et al., 2018	Interrupted time series (ITS) analysis	Los Angeles Unified School District (about 100 middle and high schools)	Suspension bans and restorative justice programs to lower student suspension rates	exclusionary and punitive disciplinary policies	Alternative conflict resolution practices; lower withdrawal rates; reduction in unequal treatment

Ingraham et al., 2016	Qualitative case study (focus groups, interviews, open-ended survey questions, triangulation of data)	teachers, students, families, university students, and community of one elementary school	Restorative justice approach and practices as a disciplinary model in school	traditional school system	Development of a peer mediation program; positive classroom and school relationship and climates; reduction in violent behaviour; development of conflict resolution strategies; reduction in social exclusion and diversity; greater scholastic and academic involvement; increased commitment from parents and the community; improved social skills (e.g., empathy, awareness, and accountability)
Kehoe et al., 2018	Qualitative study (interviews, semi-structured interviews, focus groups)	40 students, 14 teachers, six principals from six elementary, middle, and high schools	Implementation of the restorative justice approach and practices as a disciplinary model in school to promote behaviours, relationships, and a positive school climate	traditional school system	Improved social skills (e.g., empathy, awareness, and accountability); reflective thinking; reduction in behavioural problems (aggression, bullying) and greater management skills; positive school climate and social relationships between teachers and students and peers; reduced rates of anxiety and depression
Kervick et al., 2020	Qualitative case study	17 teachers and staff members and two parents from one elementary school	Year one implementation of the restorative justice approach and practices	exclusionary and punitive disciplinary policies	More positive behaviours; building of safe and engaging school classes; positive school climate and social relationships between teachers and students, families and peers; improved social skills (e.g., empathy, awareness, and accountability)
Lustick et al., 2020	Qualitative study (interviews, observations)	Students and teachers at three small public schools in an urban district	Collection of the teachers' experiences in implementing community-building circles to promote equity and inclusion	traditional school system	Difficulty of teachers in fully implementing community-building circles due to lack of adequate training and networking with other professionals in the sector (e.g., psychologists, social workers); opportunities for participants to get to know each other, fostering respect for each other and for diversity; new opportunities to teach, learn, and practice; promoting of shared learning to build mutual trust and growth; promotion of the ability to share emotions

Moir et al., 2018	Nonexperimental design (follow-up immediately post-training and six months later; recall session discussions; multiagency focus groups)	50 primary schools and nine secondary North Ayrshire Council schools (Scotland)	Effectiveness of an educational psychology service in the implementation of activities with the restorative approach	Not available	Increased use of restorative practices/activities; importance of collaboration with out-of-authority personnel to offer quality training; great impact of school leadership on the levels of the RA implementation at individual schools achieved; importance of collegiate support within an organization, school's ethos, and readiness for change; importance of EPS representation in school partnership to ensure its consistency with the RA
Norris, 2019	Nonexperimental design (T1 and T2 evaluation, implementation and delivery of restorative programs in three schools through the efforts of the local youth offending teams (YOTs))	three schools (middle and high schools)	Promotion of the restorative approach to promote well-being, in particular happiness and scholastic commitment	normal practice	Difficulty in drawing definitive conclusions on the impact of restorative practices on well-being, in particular on happiness and school commitment; evaluation of the impact of three different RA models; the RA could influence results in very specific contexts; potential of the restorative approach in positively influencing outcomes; higher levels of happiness and scholastic engagement in schools that had implemented the restorative approach to the whole school; lack of empirical evidence, especially regarding the positive influence of restorative programs on happiness: it is unclear which restorative practices are responsible for this positive influence
Parker et al., 2020	Practice-based qualitative research (interviews, observations)	four middle-grade public school teachers	Restorative dialogue practices (circle time and peace circles)	traditional hierarchical, authoritarian, and punitive school system	Building of an inclusive class community; greater communication skills through participation in dialogue; proactive conflict management; promotion of social skills (e.g., empathy, awareness and accountability)

Payne et al., 2010	Quantitative study (external data, school data analysis, student and teacher questionnaires)	294 public nonalternative secondary schools	Exploration of the effect of racial composition of the school on the use of punitive and/or restorative disciplinary responses	not available	Schools with a larger population of Black/Hispanic and low-income students are more likely to use punitive practices for management/responding to misbehaviour; the use of severe punishment increases the likelihood of choosing punitive/zero-tolerance disciplinary policies; the use of milder punishments increases the likelihood of using restorative practices; schools with qualified managers and staff are more likely to use both punitive and restorative disciplinary responses
Peurača et al., 2015	Literature review and qualitative research (questionnaires, semi-structured interviews)	three experienced experts in the field of peer mediation in Croatian schools (number of schools not available)	Nonviolent conflict resolution and implementation of peer mediation in school settings	traditional behavioural problem management strategies (e.g., exclusionary and punitive discipline)	Improved social and emotional skills (e.g., empathy, awareness, and accountability); development of reflective thinking; development of nonviolent conflict resolution strategies; problem-solving strategies; increase in positive social relationships between peers
Reimer, 2020	Qualitative case study (document analysis, participant observation, interviews, educator questionnaires, and learning circles)	one Canadian primary school	Role of restorative justice in facilitating student well-being	traditional approach	Greater sense of individual and collective coherence; greater ability to reflect on and understand daily existence; greater ability to offer support to others; greater ability to manage behavioural problems and conflicts; participation and involvement
Romano et al., 2021	Two qualitative case studies (interviews and informal check-ins)	two restorative justice coordinators at two high schools	RJ interventions to address racial disparity	traditional approach	Development of formal and informal networks; development of racial reflexivity and critical conversations about race, highlighting that the Whites and the Blacks differ in perception of racial discrimination; improved relationships between the Whites and the Blacks

Sandwick et al., 2019	Qualitative case studies (focus groups, interviews, semi-structured observations)	five middle and high schools	Restorative justice approach and restorative practices (e.g., restorative conversations, circles, restorative conferences, peer mediation) to build a restorative school community	traditional hierarchical, authoritarian, and punitive school system	Inclusive culture and reduction in inequality; positive school climate and relationships between peers and between peers and teachers; better school–family relationships; proactive conflict management; reduction in accidents, disciplinary postponements, and risky behaviours
Skrzypek et al., 2020	Qualitative and quantitative secondary survey	90 students from elementary and middle schools (number of schools not available)	Proactive implementation of restorative practices and exploration of student perceptions of the impact of restorative circles on behaviour and conflict	"traditional" disciplinary practices oriented towards punitive and exclusionary approaches	Promotion of communication; higher capacity to express thoughts and feelings; improved social skills (e.g., perspective-taking, awareness, and accountability); promotion of nonviolent problem-solving strategies; improvement of positive relationships between peers and between peers and teachers
Todic et al., 2020	Quantitative study using the 2013/2014 CHKS and a part of the CALSCHLS system (surveys targeting students, parents, and school staff)	6992 students from 32 middle and high schools in one California school district	Effects of school-based restorative justice on physical health, mental health, and academic achievement	traditional school system	Inability to evaluate the cause and effect due to the crosscutting nature of the data; limited generalizability; importance of assessing the association between restorative justice and health impact, depression, and self-reported behaviour; reduction in cases of absence for health reasons; better academic performance; higher school attendance rates; whole-school restorative approach can be a significant predictor in several respects; peer restorative justice is a significant predictor of health-related positive outcomes; need for further qualitative and quantitative studies

Vaandering, 2014	Qualitative case study design (on-site observation, policy analysis, and semi-structured interviews)	12–15 educators in two schools in Ontario	Exploration of ways to implement restorative justice in school education settings to promote relational and peaceful school culture	normal practice	Little attention to the structural elements of the school; difficulty in dealing with structural and institutional influences on the school community and RJ; little awareness of the importance of the professional contribution of the whole school to changing its culture and system; importance of providing professional tools for more effective implementation of alternative educational practices
Wang et al., 2018	Multiple-case study (qualitative and quantitative measurements and data collection methods)	13 teachers and 40 staff members from four urban schools (two elementary schools, one middle school, and one high school)	Restorative circles to improve school climate and promote alternative behavioural problem management, peaceful conflict resolution, and community building	not available	Reactive circles to deal with behavioural problems/incidents and repair relationships; positive impact of reactive circles on students' attitudes and behaviours; reduction in punitive measures; need for training and support to support teachers in the use of restorative circles
Warren et al., 2019	Randomized controlled trial (RCT) (interviews, focus groups, observations, and questionnaires)	students and teachers from secondary schools (number of schools not available)	Action groups (AG) made up of students and teachers trained in restorative justice and practices (in particular, restorative conferences, and circle time) and external facilitators	non-use of action groups trained in restorative justice	Fewer experiences of violence and bullying; greater well-being and better quality of life; reduction in health risk behaviours (smoking; substance use; dangerous sexual intercourse); reduction in the use of NHS services; more students engaged in education (reduction in absenteeism); greater inclusion; improved communication and relationships between peers and staff and students
Weaver et al., 2020	Qualitative case study design (interviews, observations, and review of documents)	students, teachers, and an administrator from one middle school	Restorative approach and restorative practices (e.g,. respect agreement, letter-writing process) as a disciplinary practice in school	traditional disciplinary practices oriented towards punitive approaches	Improved social skills (e.g., empathy, awareness, and accountability); autonomy; reflective thinking; positive relationship with teachers and peers; equitable, safe, supportive, inclusive environment; greater adherence to the rules; higher levels of academic achievement; decrease in absenteeism

Wilson et al., 2020	Qualitative case study design (focus groups, observations of classrooms and school board meetings, conversations, sets of ethnographic notes, institutional documents and data)	students, teachers, families, and school administrators from two middle schools and one high school	Restorative justice to decrease racial disparities in zero-tolerance school disciplinary measures	exclusionary and punitive disciplinary policies (i.e., zero-tolerance policies)	Development of a restorative justice program; adoption of a code of conduct for restorative practices; greater understanding and discussion of the causes of conflicts and transgressions; reduction in suspension rates; development of social skills (e.g., empathy, awareness, responsibility, accountability)
Wong et al., 2011	Quasiexperimental pre–post design	1480 high school students from four different Hong Kong schools	Restorative approach to the whole school to counter and manage bullying	traditional approach	Development of inclusive and respectful culture; reduction in bullying; higher social skills (e.g., empathy, awareness, and accountability); higher self-esteem; development of a positive school climate; importance of training for all members of school staff; conflict resolution strategies

Appendix 3

Table A3. Academic scientific literature excluded from the systematic review in prison (*n*=7).

First author, Year	Study design	Population	Intervention	Comparison	Outcomes
Albrecht, 2011	Theoretical article	Prisons in Norway	Implementation of restorative practices in the model of prison practices	Traditional system and practices	Critically reflecting on the theoretical and practical challenges for the application of restorative justice and restorative practices in prison, analysing possible limitations/problems and strengths/resources
Butler, and Maruna, 2016	Theoretical article	Prisons in UK	Whole-prisons restorative approach	Punitive discipline policies	Reflection on the development and systematization of RJ practices in the prison environment, to: replace prison disciplinary hearings with restorative processes; addressing conflicts within prisons; promote responsibility, empathy, listening
Millana et al., 2020	Theoretical article	Prisons in Spain	Restorative justice and restorative practices as an alternative prison disciplinary strategy	Traditional punitive practices	Greater responsibility than the behaviour performed; development of alternative and peaceful conflict resolution strategies; development of peaceful relations between prisoners; non-violent communication; reduction of reoffending; reduction of disciplinary sanctions; more opportunities for dialogue; greater sense of control over one's life
Perán, 2017	Theoretical article	Prisons in Spain	Implementation of restorative practices in the model of prison practices	Traditional system	Difficulty of joining the prison punitive paradigm without abolishing the prison paradigm and at the same time applying the principles and values of RJ and PR; difficulty implementing RJ and RP due to overcrowded prisons and lack of staff; possible exploitation by prisoners; need for awareness and training for prison; need for regulatory and practical frameworks; RJ and RP to prevent, address and manage the harms of imprisonment; RJ as a potential approach to prison reform; greater

					attention to human rights; reduction of violence
Strémy, and Griger, 2020	Theoretical article	Prisons	Implementation of restorative practices in the model of prison practices	Traditional system	Reflections on the punitive prison discipline and system as a question of health justice and on the importance to promote accountability for one's own actions and the harm caused to the victim, to fight the negative effects of incarceration and restore the relationship with the community
Thomas et al., 2019	Theoretical article	Prisoners with mental illness	Restorative circles to facilitate reentry in the community of offenders with mental illness	Traditional practices	Community integration; increased positive social support and (re)relationship building; deviation of the perpetrator from criminal behaviour and deviant identity; increased accountability; collective efficacy; reduced social isolation; need for regulatory and practical frameworks
Wood, 2016	Theoretical article	Prisons	Restorative justice approach and practices in prison	Traditional prison system	Reflection on the current knowledge, implementation, and sustainability of RJ practice in prisons; difficulties in integrating RJ and PR in the prison setting, partly due to inaccessibility of victims; The importance of comprehending the restorative approach as an influential element of both cultural and institutional transformation implies that the same cultural and institutional transformation and where cultural and institutional transformation are deterrents to the application of RJ and PR in prisons.

Appendix 4

Table A4. Characteristics of the included studies in systematic review in prison (*n*=11)

First author, Year	Study design	Population	Intervention	Comparison	Outcomes
Armour, and Sliva, 2018	Multimethod research (qualitative data from surveys and questionnaires)	18 offenders, 4 victims and 2 facilitators in a Texas prisons (USA)	Restorative justice group program (Bridges to Life-BTL) to reduce the recidivism and to facilitate the healing process of victim volunteers and offenders	Traditional practices	Greater responsibility for the harm caused to the victim; deviation of the perpetrator from criminal behaviour and deviant identity with consequent reduction of recidivism; increased group cohesion between prisoners and victims, including trust, cooperation, caring, support
Bohmert el al., 2018	Qualitative study (surveys)	18 level II sex offenders (Minnesota, USA)	Minnesota Circles of Support and Accountability (MnCOSA)	Traditional practices	Greater social, moral, emotional, and instrumental support (e.g., employment, housing, etc.) also with a view to returning to the community; greater responsibility for the harm caused to the victim; deviation of the perpetrator from criminal behaviour and deviant identity with consequent reduction of recidivism
Calkin, 2021	Qualitative study (semi-structured interviews)	29 inmates, 16 officers and governors, and 4 professionals in 3 UK prisons	Scope of application of RJ practices in prison, in particular their complementarity with rehabilitation practices and possible support from institutions	Traditional practices and punitive discipline policies	Positive relationships and (re)building of positive relationships between prisoners, between prisoners and families, between prisoners and officers; fairer trials; increased ability to manage/resolve conflicts, problem-solving strategies, non-violent communication, and personal and collective responsibility; need to implement RJ and RP to improve the inmate incarceration experience and as a prison disciplinary policy
Duwe, 2013	Randomized controlled trial – RCT (Preliminary Results)	62 sex offenders (Minnesota, USA)	Minnesota Circles of Support and Accountability (MnCOSA)	Traditional practice	Greater responsibility for the harm caused; reduction of recidivism (for both sexual and other crimes); reduction of the costs of detention for the institutions; economically advantageous intervention model; possibility of application to other types of prisoners with a high risk of violent recidivism

Duwe, 20118	Updates to the original trial protocol (Duwe G., 2013)	100 sex offenders (Minnesota, USA)	Minnesota Circles of Support and Accountability (MnCOSA)	Traditional practice	Greater responsibility for the harm caused; reduction of recidivism (for both sexual and other crimes); reduction of the costs of detention for the institutions; economically advantageous intervention model; possibility of application to other types of prisoners with a high risk of violent recidivism
D'Souza, and Shapland, 2023	Mixed methods (interviews and case studies)	5 offenders and 7 victims, 36 RJ's experts and 42 policemen in UK prison	Implementation of restorative justice and practices with serious and organized crime and restorative practices of victim-offender mediation and conference	Traditional practices	Non-use until then of RJ in serious and organised crime because it was considered inappropriate considering the type of crime; lack of knowledge of the pradigma; risk for inmates participating due to laws within the prison that give rise to the idea that participation means repentance; increased awareness of the harm caused, even with inmates who manifest low or no self-acceptance of responsibility; deviation of the perpetrator from criminal behaviour and deviant identity resulting in reduced recidivism; increased social capital; benefits for mental health and emotional well-being.
Gavrielides, 2014	Qualitative study (surveys)	20 interviews with prison guards, RJ professionals, policy makers and academics in a UK prison	Implementation of restorative practices in the model of prison practices	Traditional system	Difficulty of joining the prison punitive paradigm without abolishing the prison paradigm and at the same time applying the principles and values of RJ and PR; need for regulatory and practical frameworks; need to set up RJ and RP to counter isolated enforcement; need for training and knowledge; need for support (including financial) from the institutions; difficulty in creating a safe place for the participants due to the "prison internal laws"; need to implement an RJ model that is flexible and considers specific educational, psychological, and contextual needs
Nowotny, 2018	Qualitative study (semi-structured interviews)	28 people: 4 senior security representatives, 9 support service providers,	Restorative practices (circles) to reduce prison violence among prisoners and	Traditional practices and punitive discipline policies	Reduction of accidents, disciplinary sanctions, and prison crimes; non-violent communications, respect, responsibility; better

		2 members of the judiciary and 13 detainees in a Brazilian prison	implementation of restorative practices in the model of prison practices		perceived experience of detention; treatments respectful of human rights; need for regulatory and practical frameworks; need of training; need for support (including financial) from the Institutions
Stewart et al., 2018	Quantitative study (external data and questionnaire)	122 offenders in a Canada prison	Restorative practices of victim-offender mediation during and post incarceration to address recidivism	Traditional practices	Reduction of recidivism rates; deviation of the perpetrator from criminal behaviour and deviant identity; social support; need to implement RJ and RP alongside correctional rehabilitation programs
Walker, and Greening, 2010	Qualitative study (semi-structured interviews and questionnaires)	50 offenders; 280 people in totally (family, friends, victims, prison staff/counselors and offenders) in USA prison	Implementation of restorative practices to facilitate reentry in the community and circle as a tool for restorative process	Traditional practice	Greater perceived social support: greater sense of justice perceived by victims; increased responsibility for the harm caused and its consequences; reconstruction of the link between prisoner and family and between prisoner and community; reduction of recidivism
Weimann-Saks, and Peleg-Koriat, 2020	Randomized controlled trial – RCT	133 male detainees from two Israeli prisons (68 from a rehabilitation prison and 65 from a normal prison)	Restorative practices as a tool to increase victims' awareness of harm, willingness to participate in a restorative process and whether attitudes towards this willingness varied between prisons with different therapeutic-rehabilitation orientation	Traditional practices	Increased awareness of the harm caused, even with detainees who manifest low or no self-acceptance of responsibility; increased willingness to participate in restorative processes; increased accountability; need for combine restorative practices and treatment programs; need for standards and guidelines; need to implement an RJ model that is flexible and considers specific educational, psychological, and contextual needs.

Appendix 5

Restorative Attitudes Scale

Restorative justice is an approach aimed at addressing harm or the risk of harm by involving all those affected to reach a common understanding and agreement on how the harm or wrong can be repaired and justice achieved. Rather than separating people or excluding those perceived as a threat, restorative processes restore protection and security by bringing people together to undo injustice, repair harm, and alleviate suffering through dialogue and understanding (EFRJ, 2018).

According to scholars, a restorative attitude is characterized by a focus on people and events with respect (for rules, laws, others), responsibility, a sense of justice, and empathy.

For example, when one person causes harm or wrongs another person, we try to understand the needs, feelings, and emotions of those involved and engage them together in finding solutions to right the wrongs that have occurred. Thus, the focus of the response is on what happened, addressing the harm that resulted and its consequences.

Now, please read carefully and choose your answer by clicking on the number of the answer you choose. Choose only one answer. Be sure to answer all questions—do not leave any blank. This is not a test—there are no right or wrong answers.

Thinking about what you read at the beginning, for each pair of opposite adjectives, choose which one you think best describes the restorative attitude. Then indicate whether the adjective you have chosen describes the restorative attitude very much, quite a lot, or not very much by placing a cross in the appropriate box. Use the middle box only when you think that neither of the two adjectives describes the restorative attitude.

Restorative Attitude is …								
	Very	**Fairly**	**Not very**	**Neutral**	**Not very**	**Fairly**	**Very**	
Fair	7	6	5	4	3	2	1	**Unfair**
Consistent	7	6	5	4	3	2	1	**Inconsistent**
Appropriate	7	6	5	4	3	2	1	**Inadequate**
Important	7	6	5	4	3	2	1	**Insignificant**
Fundamental	7	6	5	4	3	2	1	**Secondary**
Useful	7	6	5	4	3	2	1	**Useless**
Advantageous	7	6	5	4	3	2	1	**Disadvantageous**
Predictable	7	6	5	4	3	2	1	**Unpredictable**
Easy	7	6	5	4	3	2	1	**Difficult**
Stable	7	6	5	4	3	2	1	**Unstable**
Absolute	7	6	5	4	3	2	1	**Relative**
Indulgent	7	6	5	4	3	2	1	**Strict**
Flexible	7	6	5	4	3	2	1	**Rigid**
Lenient	7	6	5	4	3	2	1	**Inclement**

Compassionate	7	6	5	4	3	2	1	**Ruthless**
Intelligent	7	6	5	4	3	2	1	**Foolish**
Deserving	7	6	5	4	3	2	1	**Undeserving**
Admirable	7	6	5	4	3	2	1	**Despicable**
Appreciable	7	6	5	4	3	2	1	**Contemptible**
Recoverable	7	6	5	4	3	2	1	**Irretrievable**
Courageous	7	6	5	4	3	2	1	**Fearful**
Winning	7	6	5	4	3	2	1	**Loser**
Responsible	7	6	5	4	3	2	1	**Irresponsible**
Defensible	7	6	5	4	3	2	1	**Indefensible**
Peaceful	7	6	5	4	3	2	1	**Aggressive**
Altruistic	7	6	5	4	3	2	1	**Selfish**
Worthy	7	6	5	4	3	2	1	**Unworthy**
Sociable	7	6	5	4	3	2	1	**Antisocial**
Open	7	6	5	4	3	2	1	**Closed**
Extroverted	7	6	5	4	3	2	1	**Introverted**
Honest	7	6	5	4	3	2	1	**Dishonest**
Efficient	7	6	5	4	3	2	1	**Inefficient**

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