

**The Effectiveness of Restorative Justice in Resolving Minor Criminal Offenses
under Indonesia's New Criminal Code**

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Abstract

This study examines the effectiveness of restorative justice in resolving minor criminal offenses under Indonesia's new Criminal Code, as stipulated in Law Number 1 of 2023. The study employs qualitative library research using normative juridical, statutory, and conceptual approaches. Legal materials were collected from the new Criminal Code, regulations concerning restorative justice issued by law-enforcement institutions, relevant court decisions, scholarly books, and peer-reviewed journal articles. The data were analyzed through qualitative content analysis by identifying, classifying, and interpreting legal norms and restorative justice principles. The findings indicate that restorative justice has significant potential to resolve minor criminal offenses more effectively, proportionately, and humanely than conventional retributive mechanisms. This approach promotes victim recovery, offender accountability, compensation for harm, reconciliation, and the restoration of social relationships. Its principles are consistent with the new Criminal Code's sentencing objectives, which emphasize conflict resolution, restoration of social balance, rehabilitation, judicial pardon, and alternatives to short-term imprisonment. Nevertheless, its effectiveness remains constrained by fragmented regulations among law-enforcement agencies, differences in eligibility criteria, limited facilitator competence, unequal bargaining positions between victims and offenders, and inadequate monitoring of restorative agreements. Therefore, restorative justice should not merely be measured by the number of cases terminated or diverted from formal proceedings, but also by victim satisfaction, fulfillment of agreements, offender reintegration, and reduced recidivism. The study concludes that restorative justice can become an effective mechanism for resolving minor offenses provided that its implementation is supported by harmonized regulations, victim centered safeguards, competent facilitators, transparent procedures, and continuous evidence-based evaluation.

Keywords: restorative justice; minor criminal offenses; new Criminal Code; victim recovery

Introduction

Conventional criminal justice systems have historically been dominated by a retributive paradigm that views criminal acts as violations of law and state authority, directing the primary response toward imposing proportionate punishment on the offender. Under this paradigm, the success of law enforcement is often measured by the imposition of sentences and the deprivation of liberty, while victims are relegated to the role of witnesses in the evidentiary process rather than being treated as parties whose needs for restoration must be met. This orientation toward retribution and incarceration has limitations; it often fails to provide restitution, psychological recovery, or meaningful participation for victims, nor does it encourage offenders to understand and rectify the consequences of their actions. Furthermore, this approach is inadequate for restoring the trust and social relationships damaged by the crime. Conceptually, retributive justice restores justice through the unilateral imposition of punishment, whereas restorative justice

emphasizes the restoration of values, relationships, and social consensus through a participatory process involving the affected parties (Wenzel et al., 2008). Meta-analytic findings indicate that restorative justice programs tend to yield higher levels of satisfaction among victims and offenders, as well as better compliance with restitution, compared to conventional judicial mechanisms (Latimer et al., 2005).

These limitations have driven a global transformation toward criminal justice systems that are more humane, proportionate, rehabilitative, and restorative. This transformation does not eliminate criminal accountability; rather, it positions sentencing as an instrument for repairing harm, rehabilitating offenders, protecting victims, and restoring social balance. Restorative justice creates space for victims, offenders, families, and the community to participate voluntarily in identifying the harm caused, determining the form of accountability, and formulating fair agreements for restoration. This approach aligns with the principle of people-centered justice by expanding access to case resolution processes that are participatory, responsive, and proportionate to the severity of the offense (United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime [UNODC], 2020). Criminal justice reform is also closely linked to Sustainable Development Goal 16—specifically Target 16.3—which emphasizes strengthening the rule of law and ensuring equal access to justice for all. Thus, the development of restorative mechanisms can contribute to establishing justice institutions that are effective, accountable, and inclusive, and capable of delivering substantive justice (United Nations General Assembly, 2015).

Minor criminal offenses are characterized by a relatively limited degree of culpability, financial loss, potential penalty, and social impact compared to serious crimes. They typically involve reparable harm and do not cause widespread consequences, allowing for resolution through compensation, apologies, or other forms of proportionate accountability. Within the Indonesian judicial context, Supreme Court Regulation Number 1 of 2024 designates minor offenses—or cases where the victim's financial loss does not exceed IDR 2,500,000—as a category eligible for resolution through a restorative justice approach (Supreme Court of the Republic of Indonesia, 2024). However, subjecting minor offenses to formal judicial proceedings risks creating an imbalance between the offender's culpability and the resulting legal consequences. The processes of investigation, prosecution, trial, and sentencing can inflict a greater impact than the initial harm caused, particularly when the offender is a first-time offender who has admitted guilt and is willing to make reparations to the victim.

Resolving minor offenses through formal mechanisms can also increase case-handling costs, prolong resolution times, strain the resources of law enforcement and the courts, and stigmatize the offender. If the process results in a prison sentence, the offender may lose their job, suffer the breakdown of family relationships, and face difficulties reintegrating into society after serving their term. Excessive reliance on imprisonment also contributes to prison overcrowding and can undermine the effectiveness of inmate rehabilitation programs. Therefore, the principle of proportionality dictates that the severity of the legal response should be commensurate with the gravity of the offense, the extent of the loss, the victim's circumstances, and the offender's capacity for accountability (United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime [UNODC], 2007). Restorative justice mechanisms are relevant here, as they offer a resolution that is faster, simpler, participatory, and focused on reparation, without absolving the offender of criminal accountability. However, its implementation must ensure the voluntary participation of the parties, victim protection, equality of standing, fulfillment of the agreement, and the prevention of reoffending, so that it does not devolve into a mere termination of the case (UNODC, 2020).

Restorative justice is an approach to resolving criminal cases that prioritizes repairing the harm caused by the offense through the active involvement of the victim,

offender, families, community, and law enforcement officials in a process characterized by dialogue, safety, and fairness. This approach is founded on principles such as victim recovery, offender accountability, voluntary participation, reparation, reconciliation, community involvement, and the offender's social reintegration. Unlike retributive justice, which focuses on the violation against the state and the imposition of proportionate punishment, restorative justice centers on the harm suffered by the victim, the needs of the parties involved, and the offender's obligation to redress the consequences of their actions (Wenzel et al., 2008). Implementation may take the form of an admission of wrongdoing, an apology, restitution, community service, rehabilitation, or other proportionate agreements. Therefore, restorative justice should not be reduced merely to a settlement or the termination of legal proceedings; rather, it must ensure victim participation free from coercion, genuine offender accountability, the fulfillment of agreements, and the equitable restoration of social relationships (United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime [UNODC], 2020).

Previous research indicates that the application of restorative justice in Indonesia has been examined across various stages of the criminal justice system, albeit with differing focuses and methodologies. At the investigation stage, Widiatmika's (2023) empirical-descriptive legal study at the General Criminal Investigation Directorate of the Bali Regional Police found that the implementation of Police Regulation Number 8 of 2021 was suboptimal due to limited understanding, a lack of mediation facilities, and inconsistent execution; however, the study's scope—limited to a single regional police institution—restricts the generalizability of its findings. At the prosecution stage, a socio-legal study by Agustin et al. (2021) demonstrated that the termination of prosecution under Prosecutor's Office Regulation Number 15 of 2020 could yield resolutions more beneficial to both victims and offenders, despite challenges regarding differing interpretations of requirements and weak inter-agency coordination. A normative-prescriptive study at the court level by Hardiyanti et al. (2024) found that reconciliation and restoration were utilized by judges when determining verdicts, yet the research did not measure verdict consistency, victim satisfaction, the implementation of agreements, or rates of recidivism. Meanwhile, Listyarini's (2017) research on diversion within the juvenile criminal justice system underscored the benefits of restorative justice in safeguarding the best interests of the child and avoiding stigmatization; however, the unique nature of juvenile justice means these findings cannot be directly generalized to adult offenders involved in minor offenses.

Studies regarding the National Criminal Code (KUHP) reveal a shift in sentencing orientation from a colonial-retributive paradigm toward substantive justice, rehabilitation, social balance, and the recognition of living law within society (Faisal et al., 2024). Nevertheless, as most of this research was conducted prior to Law Number 1 of 2023 taking effect, the studies largely assessed normative constructs rather than the effectiveness of actual implementation. Previous research has tended to be sectoral in nature, addressing the powers of the police, the prosecution, or the courts in isolation, while success metrics have been dominated by the number of cases discontinued and the achievement of reconciliation. Consequently, there is a lack of synthesis integrating normative effectiveness, procedural efficiency, victim restoration, offender accountability, agreement fulfillment, social reintegration, and the prevention of recidivism. Addressing this gap, this study offers an integrative literature review on the effectiveness of restorative justice in resolving minor criminal offenses under the National Criminal Code, linking all stages of the criminal justice process and employing multidimensional effectiveness indicators. This approach distinguishes the study from earlier research limited to the analysis of sectoral regulations or a single stage of law enforcement.

Research Methods

This study employs a qualitative approach utilizing an integrative literature review combined with a normative-juridical legal research method. It incorporates statutory, conceptual, and case-based approaches to analyze the effectiveness of restorative justice in resolving minor criminal offenses under the National Criminal Code. Primary legal materials include Law Number 1 of 2023 concerning the Criminal Code, National Police Regulation Number 8 of 2021, Attorney General's Office Regulation Number 15 of 2020, Supreme Court Regulation Number 1 of 2024, and relevant court rulings. Secondary legal materials were obtained from indexed journal articles, scholarly books, research reports, and official institutional publications. Literature searches were conducted via Scopus, Web of Science, HeinOnline, Google Scholar, and Garuda databases using keywords such as "restorative justice," "minor criminal offenses," "termination of prosecution," "judicial decisions," and "new Indonesian Criminal Code." While the primary literature was limited to publications from 2012 to 2026, relevant seminal works were also utilized to strengthen the theoretical foundation. Articles were selected based on their relevance to the research focus, methodological clarity, source credibility, full-text availability, and language.

Data analysis involved stages of identification, selection, classification, thematic coding, interpretation, and critical synthesis of legal materials and prior research findings. Selected literature was categorized according to the stages of investigation, prosecution, and trial; types of minor offenses; the sentencing orientation of the National Criminal Code; and the benefits and obstacles associated with implementing restorative justice. Effectiveness was analyzed across dimensions including normative alignment, procedural efficiency, victim restoration, offender accountability, agreement fulfillment, community involvement, social reintegration, and the prevention of recidivism. The validity of the analysis is ensured through source triangulation by comparing legislation, court rulings, empirical research findings, and conceptual literature. As this study does not employ statistical meta-analysis, effectiveness is determined based on the consistency, convergence, and strength of evidence across various sources, while also considering contextual differences and the methodological limitations of each study.

Result and Discussion

Restorative Orientation under the New Criminal Code

Literature review findings indicate that Article 51 of Law Number 1 of 2023 has altered the philosophical basis of sentencing in Indonesia by incorporating conflict resolution, the restoration of balance, and the creation of a sense of security and peace within society into the objectives of sentencing. This formulation demonstrates that sentencing is no longer aimed solely at inflicting suffering upon the offender but also at repairing the social damage caused by the criminal act. In the context of minor offenses, this orientation provides a normative basis for more proportionate resolutions, as the harm suffered by the victim and the affected social relationships can often be restored without resorting to imprisonment. These findings align with Riyadi (2024), who concluded that the National Criminal Code integrates restorative justice principles by emphasizing social harmony, offender rehabilitation, and the protection of victims' interests. Nevertheless, Article 51 must be understood as a guideline regarding sentencing objectives rather than an automatic basis for terminating a case.

The individualization of sentencing is further reinforced by Article 54 of the National Criminal Code, which mandates that judges consider the nature of the culpability, the motive, the offender's state of mind, their personal and social circumstances, the impact of the crime on the victim, victim forgiveness, and the values of law and justice prevailing in society. Article 54 paragraph (2) also allows for judicial forgiveness if the act is relatively

minor, the offender's personal circumstances are relevant, or the situation at the time of or following the offense suggests that imposing a sentence would conflict with considerations of justice and humanity. Judicial forgiveness does not negate the offender's culpability but enables the judge to declare the act proven without imposing a criminal penalty or measure. These findings reinforce the results of Hardiyanti et al. (2024), who found that reconciliation and restorative efforts have been utilized as considerations in judicial rulings. Evolving practices indicate that judicial forgiveness rulings have begun to be applied following the entry into force of the new Criminal Code and Criminal Procedure Code, including in cases of assault and petty theft (Supreme Court of the Republic of Indonesia, 2026). Another innovation is found in Article 65 of the National Criminal Code, which recognizes supervision sentences and community service sentences as forms of principal punishment. Under Article 75, a supervision sentence may be imposed for offenses punishable by a maximum of five years' imprisonment, provided that sentencing objectives and guidelines are taken into account. Meanwhile, Article 85 allows for the imposition of community service for offenses punishable by less than five years' imprisonment, provided the judge intends to impose a prison term of no more than six months or a fine not exceeding Category II. Both forms of punishment are relevant for minor offenses, as they can spare offenders the negative consequences of incarceration while maintaining elements of accountability, rehabilitation, and social reintegration. However, supervision and community service sentences are not synonymous with restorative justice; they are non-custodial sentencing instruments that can support restorative goals if their implementation also addresses victim recovery and the reparation of harm.

From a paradigmatic perspective, these provisions signal a shift from a predominantly retributive sentencing approach toward a model that integrates corrective, rehabilitative, and restorative functions. The corrective function is evident in efforts to improve the offender's behavior; the rehabilitative function is realized through guidance and reintegration; and the restorative function is reflected in conflict resolution and the restoration of social balance. These findings align with Faisal et al. (2024), who view the National Criminal Code as a transition from colonial criminal law to a system more oriented toward substantive justice and Indonesian social values. Nevertheless, this study also finds that the National Criminal Code does not entirely abandon retributive elements, as imprisonment, fines, and severe sanctions remain in place. Thus, the Code is best understood as an integrative sentencing model that balances proportionate retribution, deterrence, rehabilitation, and restoration.

Although it provides a robust substantive foundation, the National Criminal Code (KUHP) does not independently regulate every stage and procedure for case resolution based on restorative justice. Legal developments following initial studies indicate that Law Number 20 of 2025 concerning the Criminal Procedure Code (KUHAP) has established a clearer procedural basis through Articles 79–88, covering the stages of preliminary inquiry, formal investigation, prosecution, and court proceedings. This updates the situation previously analyzed by Agustin et al. (2021), Widiatmika (2023), and Hardiyanti et al. (2024), a time when restorative justice relied heavily on the specific sectoral regulations of individual institutions. Thus, the relationship between the KUHP and the KUHAP is complementary: the KUHP defines the values, objectives, and sentencing options, while the KUHAP provides the procedural pathways to operationalize these restorative mechanisms.

At the implementation level, the effectiveness of restorative justice remains contingent upon the harmonization of the KUHAP with National Police Regulation Number 8 of 2021, Attorney General's Regulation Number 15 of 2020, Supreme Court Regulation Number 1 of 2024, and other internal guidelines used by law enforcement

agencies. Article 88 of the KUHAP mandates the issuance of a government regulation regarding the implementation of restorative justice mechanisms; however, at the time of this study, such a regulation had not yet been issued. This situation creates the potential for discrepancies in requirements, authority, oversight, and resolution standards across different stages of the judicial process (Putri & Laia, 2026). These findings align with research by Widiatmika (2023) and Agustin et al. (2021), which identified varying interpretations among officials, coordination issues, and inconsistent application as primary obstacles. Consequently, the normative strength of the KUHAP does not, in itself, guarantee the effectiveness of restorative justice; Its success also requires integrated technical regulations, facilitator competence, victim protection, monitoring of agreement compliance, and results-based evaluation.

Characteristics and Eligibility of Minor Criminal Offenses

A minor criminal offense is essentially a criminal act characterized by a relatively limited degree of severity, culpability, loss, and social impact. However, this category should not be determined solely by the value of material loss; rather, it requires an integrated assessment considering the prescribed penalty, the manner in which the act was committed, the consequences for the victim, the circumstances of the offender, and the public interest. Supreme Court Regulation Number 1 of 2024 designates minor offenses—or cases where victim loss does not exceed IDR 2,500,000—as a category eligible for a restorative justice approach. Meanwhile, the 2025 Criminal Procedure Code (KUHAP) provides a broader scope, covering offenses punishable only by a maximum Category III fine or a maximum of five years' imprisonment, subject to specific exceptions (Supreme Court of the Republic of Indonesia, 2024; Republic of Indonesia, 2025). Thus, a low level of severity serves as a preliminary criterion but does not automatically render a case suitable for restorative resolution.

A further characteristic is that the loss suffered by the victim must be capable of direct and measurable redress. Redress may be achieved through the return of property, payment of restitution, repair of damaged items, coverage of medical expenses, an apology, or other actions agreed upon by the victim and the offender. Consequently, cases potentially suitable for restorative justice include petty theft, low-value embezzlement, minor property damage, minor assault, and interpersonal conflicts that do not generate widespread social impact. Nevertheless, case classification alone should not dictate the decision, as offenses bearing the same legal label can vary significantly in terms of the extent of loss, the relationship between the parties, and the consequences involved. Redress must be tailored to the victim's actual needs and should not be limited to material compensation if there are psychological or social impacts that also require remediation (United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime [UNODC], 2020). The suitability of restorative justice is also influenced by the offender's characteristics—specifically, their status as a first-time offender, the absence of a pattern of repeat criminal behavior, and a demonstrated sense of remorse alongside a willingness to make amends for the harm caused. An admission of guilt is crucial because restorative justice is grounded in active accountability rather than merely serving as a means to circumvent formal judicial proceedings. The offender's willingness must be demonstrated through the fulfillment of concrete obligations, such as providing restitution, repairing damage, undergoing counseling, or performing community service. The 2025 Criminal Procedure Code (KUHAP) incorporates the status of a first-time offense and the absence of recidivism as factors in determining the appropriateness of the restorative justice mechanism (Republic of Indonesia, 2025). These findings align with Agustin et al. (2021), who demonstrated that the successful discontinuation of prosecution

based on restorative justice depends heavily on the offender's willingness to accept responsibility, the achievement of reconciliation, and the tangible implementation of the agreement.

Victim consent is a fundamental requirement determining the legitimacy of the restorative process. Such consent must be given knowingly and voluntarily after the victim has received adequate information regarding the procedures, consequences, the right to refuse, and the available forms of reparation. The restorative justice process must not be conducted through pressure, intimidation, threats, deception, or the exploitation of economic or social dependencies. Law enforcement officials must assess the existence of any power dynamics that might hinder the victim from freely expressing their interests, particularly in cases involving family ties, employment, gender, age, or economic dependency. The UNODC (2020) emphasizes that safety, voluntariness, and the parties' capacity to provide consent are primary prerequisites for the restorative process. Consequently, a peace agreement cannot be considered substantively valid if it was obtained because the victim was afraid, coerced, or in a position of unequal bargaining power.

Ultimately, the suitability of restorative justice must take into account the interests of the community and the impact of the criminal offense on public order. National Police Regulation Number 8 of 2021 stipulates that a case must not provoke public opposition, social conflict, potential division, or widespread unrest (Indonesian National Police, 2021). Restorative justice is inappropriate if the offender is a repeat offender, the victim is subject to significant power imbalances, there is pressure to settle, or the offense involves public interests that cannot be reduced to a private dispute. This approach must also be restricted in cases posing a serious threat to safety, bodily integrity, national security, or vulnerable groups. Therefore, decisions regarding case suitability must be based on individualized assessment, victim protection, proportionality, and the public interest, rather than solely on the existence of a peace agreement or the payment of compensation.

Conclusion

The findings indicate that restorative justice has significant potential to resolve minor criminal offenses more effectively, proportionately, and humanely than conventional retributive mechanisms. This approach promotes victim recovery, offender accountability, compensation for harm, reconciliation, and the restoration of social relationships. Its principles are consistent with the new Criminal Code's sentencing objectives, which emphasize conflict resolution, restoration of social balance, rehabilitation, judicial pardon, and alternatives to short-term imprisonment. Nevertheless, its effectiveness remains constrained by fragmented regulations among law-enforcement agencies, differences in eligibility criteria, limited facilitator competence, unequal bargaining positions between victims and offenders, and inadequate monitoring of restorative agreements. Therefore, restorative justice should not merely be measured by the number of cases terminated or diverted from formal proceedings, but also by victim satisfaction, fulfillment of agreements, offender reintegration, and reduced recidivism. The study concludes that restorative justice can become an effective mechanism for resolving minor offenses provided that its implementation is supported by harmonized regulations, victim centered safeguards, competent facilitators, transparent procedures, and continuous evidence-based evaluation.

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