Book Review

Restorative justice in practice – evaluating what works for victims and offenders

Joanna Shapland, Gwen Robinson and Angela Sorsby

Routledge, London, 2011, 227 pp., £25.99, ISBN: 978-1843928454 (paperback)

Security Journal (2015) **28**, 105–106. doi:10.1057/sj.2012.26; published online 13 January 2014

No other justice practice has attracted as much attention as Restorative Justice (RJ) has in such a short period of time since John Braithwaite (1985) introduced the concept to a wider audience than had previously been aware of the idea. The authors of this text note that Kathleen Daly (2004) comments on the proliferation of edited collections or book-length treatments on RJ responses to offending written in English with still more to come. The concept has also been embraced recently by other disciplines (for example, Beck *et al*, 2011; Gal, 2011) and looks like remaining as a shining beacon in the criminological firmament for some while yet. With so much already having been written about the subject, the reader may ponder if there is anything new to say about RJ.

Indeed, the authors themselves (with colleagues) have written elsewhere (Shapland *et al*, 2004, 2006, 2007, 2008) on aspects of the research on which this book is based, thus some readers may be familiar with the work reported on here. Notwithstanding that the current text presents an interesting and engaging, complete overview of the results of, an arguably unique, research project.

The research concerns possibly the largest and most complete trial of RJ with adult offenders worldwide. The research was undertaken between 2001 and 2008 and concerns the evaluation of three RJ schemes (involving 840 RJ events differing in size, geographic area, methods [using conferencing, direct or indirect mediation] and aims, including observations of some 285 conferences or direct mediations) through from the beginning until the end of pilots including an evaluation of reoffending over a period of more than 2 years. The schemes and the evaluation were funded by the UK Home Office (now the Ministry of Justice) under its Crime Reduction Programme.

Most RJ work in England and Wales has involved young offenders and primarily more minor offences. The three RJ schemes reported upon here were deliberately designed, however, to be primarily for adult offenders, include serious offences and involve RJ at many different stages of criminal justice. All victims and offenders experienced the normal criminal justice response: the RJ was in parallel to criminal justice, not diversionary. RJ took place after an admission of guilt or guilty plea by the offender and was entirely voluntary on the victim and offender.

In terms of structure, the book is organised in a logical, simple manner with 11 chapters divided into 3 substantive sections. Section 1 focuses on how previous schemes working with adult offenders have fared and the activities needed to set up and run RJ schemes.

The next section considers the experiences of all the participants (both victims and offenders) in the three schemes – the middle chapter presents five case studies, which offers the reader a feeling of being an observer of the process and I suspect will help explain the whole context for those readers who are unfamiliar with RJ. The third and final section looks back at the experience of RJ from the perspective of victims and offenders and at the effects on reoffending and to what extent the schemes proved value for money.

As Kathleen Daly points out, there is a lot written about RJ and the literature to date does demonstrate both the promise and the perils of RJ. However, this is a young literature, short on theoretical sophistication or rigorous empirical research, and far too dominated by comparisons of different forms of RJ. Shapland, Robinson and Sorsby's book goes a long way in redressing that balance and will prove to be the standard against which all subsequent RJ research will have to be measured.

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Ian Paylor

Senior Lecturer in Applied Social Science,
Lancaster University, Lancaster, UK