

Victim Offender Mediation/Dialogue as a Parole Requirement and A Strategy to Ensure Successful Reintegration of Offenders in A Correctional Facility- in the North-West Province

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Abstract. Victim-offender dialogue (VOD) has been proposed as an important restorative justice method of ensuring that the offenders settle back to the communities and families of South Africa. Nevertheless, as much as accountability, healing, and reconciliation will be encouraged through this strategy, the victims and secondary victims face significant chances of being affected, where they usually encounter emotional re-traumatization and low empowerment during the strategy. This paper has analyses VOD as a parole condition and is useful in facilitating effective re-entry of offender. Qualitative approach and descriptive research design were chosen to investigate the experience and perceptions of ten correctional officials who were chosen using a quota sampling technique under the varying ranks. The data collection was performed through semi-structured interviews, and their analytical approach was thematic to determine patterns and meanings pertaining to the practices of reintegration. The results showed that despite the positive impact that VOD has on the accountability and rehabilitation of offenders, victims are often sidelined, and they are poorly served. The correctional administrators mentioned limitations of overcrowding, overworking, and insufficient resources, which inhibit efficient implementation of the programme and reduce the effectiveness of reintegration. The research concludes that VOD provides a useful element of the parole procedures, but to be effective, it requires a well-structured approach to sufficiently empower victims, interdepartmental cooperation, and better institutional support of correctional workers. Enhancement of policy implementation, improving counselling services as well as encouraging community participation are fundamental to the realization of sustainable reintegration and a decrease in recidivism.

Keywords Victim offender dialogue; victim empowerment; parole, reintegration.

Introduction

In South Africa, restorative justice has gained significant acceptance in the criminal court system to supplement the traditional punishment approach. One of its fundamental restorative practices is called Victim-Offender Mediation (VOM) or Victim-Offender Dialogue (VOD). It is a change process that encumbers perpetrators and victims within an orderly and guided setup to enhance recovery, reconciliation, and responsibility. In the correctional services- especially in the North West Province- VOM/ VOD has been identified as a mandatory condition of parole and a strategic intervention to help in an effective reintegration of the offenders back to the society.

Although it was intended to do this, the current reintegration programmes in South Africa are still inadequate because most offenders revert to criminal behaviour soon after their release. Research has demonstrated that a weak restorative process is reinforced by lack of victim empowerment, inadequate counselling and poor coordination that inter-departments have (Gustafson, 2018; Valdivia, 2023; Littman et al., 2023). Rehabilitation and social reintegration are highlighted in the White Paper on Corrections (2005) as the focus of the policy of corrections, yet the policy subtly fails in achievement due to several issues that characterise the contribution of correctional policies: overcrowding, lacking resources and unequal

participation in the restorative programmes. The gap is closed through this research which evaluates the use of victim-offender discussions as a parole condition and their impact in ensuring meaningful reintegration in correctional institutions in the North West Province.

It is based on the principles of restorative justice and the legal context of White Paper on Corrections (2005) and attempts to evaluate how VOD can be utilized in the rehabilitation and reintegration of offenders in the White Paper on Corrections (2005). In my opinion, it will describe the factors that lead to the effectiveness of VOD in the context of the White Paper on Corrections (2005). One of the research questions was to answer how victim offender dialogue helps to make sure that offenders are fully reintegrated back into their respective families and communities. Purposes of the research are to investigate the usefulness of VOD in ensuring successful rehabilitation and decreasing recidivism and to determine issues associated with correctional officials using VOD as a condition of parole.

VOD is also known as Victim-Offender Mediation (VOM). It has become a phenomenon with much importance, in the correctional setting of South Africa, as a tool of restorative justice. It is a program that involves a carefully designed, facilitated process of gathering victims and offenders in a controlled setting to enhance healing, reconciliation, and accountability of offenders (Gustafson, 2018; Littman et al., 2023). Direct engagement allows the victims to share their suffering, pose questions, and stress the outcomes of their actions to the offenders, whereas the latter accept the responsibility and apologize because of their actions. In this sense, VOD supplements traditional punitive strategies because it stresses emotional restoration and social healing and not retribution. It is adopted by the Department of Correctional Services (DCS) as an alternative to parole shows its importance in ensuring rehabilitation and a low rate of recidivism, particularly in the socio-cultural environment of the North West Province, where communal values and reconciliation are still strongly embedded (Valdivia, 2023).

Policy Frameworks

The policy and practice framework of the South African correctional policy framework is well entrenched in the theoretical and legal aspects of VOD. Rehabilitation and reintegration are the other essential correctional objectives defined by the White Paper on Corrections (2005) and they consider the rights of the offender and the victim. The policy defines the necessity to restore relationships ruined by crime and acknowledge the fact that crime is a crime against another person. It is in line with the constitutional requirement of safeguarding human dignity and equality. In the same vein, the Department of Justice and Constitutional Development (2012) swears by restorative justice as a significant instalment of the justice system, relying on the post-apartheid ethos of reconciliation in the country. Irrespective of these policy promises, there is a gap inputting the working realization. A shortage of resources, the lack of the interdepartmental coordination, and the lack of training of the facilitators have been identified as serious obstacles towards achieving the full potential of restorative programmes (McGuire, 2018; Louw, 2021). All these difficulties tend to create discrepancy in provision of VOD sessions and undermine reintegration efforts in the long run.

VOD has proven to have several positive effects both to the victims and the offenders. To the victims, it offers them an empowerment, emotional and psychological healing platform. Holding face-to-face interaction with perpetrators enables the victims with the power to take back their stories and to get closure following the traumatic experiences (Valdivia, 2023). To offenders, the process should encourage empathy, moral thinking, and responsibility, which would see the meaningful change in behaviour and decreased risk of re-offending (Littman et al., 2023). Recent works of African study have also established that restorative justice programs can have a transformative role in post-conflict and correctional programs under the condition of proper implementation. Indicatively, Rutayisire et al., (2025) reported that structured conversations in Rwanda and Zimbabwe encouraged reconciliation and reintegration as (Montsho, 2021) showed that South African perpetrators who had undergone mediated dialogues had reduced recidivism rates and better acceptance by the community. These findings indicate that restorative justice with the application of psychosocial support and robust engagement with community can work towards considerable transformation, adding to the long-term rehabilitation and social integration.

Nevertheless, there are still several implementation issues that restrict the effects of VOD in the South African correctional centres. The restorative process is hampered by overcrowding, insufficient number of staff, and the inability to access counselling services by both a victim and an offender (Legodi and Dube, 2023). The communication of the offender about parole is weak or delayed and only when the offender is about to be released are they contacted once again. This kind of practices results in perceptions of secondary victimization and lack of trust in the justice system (Louw, 2021; Kholofelo and Tirivangasi, 2021). Further, the lack of the working monitoring system of post-dialogue support and non-cooperation between the Departments of Correctional Services and Social Development hinders sustainability of reconciliation. Recent research in Africa (2021-2024) suggests that comparable structural impediments may include insufficient funds, cultural deficiencies in professional training, and organizational irresponsibility in the delivery of the restorative justice (Montsho, 2021). These endemic problems highlight the fact that better policy integration and regular stakeholder involvement is required.

Methodology

A qualitative method and a descriptive research design was used to capture the opinion of the correctional officials in an overcrowded facility in South Africa about Victim Offender Dialogue (VOD) as a requirement of parole as well as an important instrument of enhancing the successful reintegration of offenders. The methodology allowed the researcher to get detailed accounts of the experiences and perceptions of the officials in context as opposed to a quantitative trend, and thus it was suitable in addressing the research questions centered on the realization of how VOD is practiced and perceived (Chetty, 2016; Rillo & Alieto, 2018). A qualitative descriptive research design enables the researcher to gather extensive researcher data, ensuring that all features of the events are properly documented (Legodi & Dube, 2023).

One-on-one semi-structured interviews as directed by an interview schedule that was prepared directly informed by objectives of the research on VOD, parole requirements and reintegration were used to collect the data. The interviews that were selected were semi-structured since they offered a balance between cross-participation comparability and a degree of flexibility to ask more questions and seek depth and elucidation (Reid and Mash, 2014). The interviews were meticulously held in the privacy of offices within the correctional setting when the participants found it comfortable and were recorded and conducted with the consent of the participants to a tune of 45-60 minutes. This approach helped the author to discuss how officials conceptualized VOD, how they perceived its application in an overcrowded facility, and how they perceived its impact on successful reintegration.

Participants

The research was done at Rooigrond Correctional Centre and Rooigrond Community Corrections Office in the North West Province. Target population refers to “only those cases that theoretically might be selected as research participants, those who are potentially accessible to the researcher...” (Dube, 2019). Participants were selected with the help of quota sampling because the officials of the correctional institution have varying ranks and roles that define their participation in VOD and parole. Non-probability sampling was employed as a quota sampling that made it possible to include the members of the population that would have best represented these key subgroups (Yang & Banamah, 2014, as cited in Legodi and Dube, 2023). The sample was stratified based on the roles worked in the correctional system- wardens, social workers, parole officers and unit or workshop managers- and through this, officials within each independent category would be selected purposely till the quotas were achieved. Ten correctional officials took part in the research, and the interviews were terminated once the data became saturated, i.e. no new themes came out. In a table presented in the results section, the demographics of the participants, such as role, rank and years of service, are summarized. Table 1 showed the summary of demographic data.

Data Collection Procedure

The researcher obtained ethical clearance from NWU HREC to enable her to carry out the study outside the

university. Before the interviews commenced, the researcher got the services of an independent person who distributed and collected the consent forms. The independent person was the student from North-West University doing third year in LLB and was familiar with the correctional facility. The researcher eventually conducted the interviews with the participants in the study as the researcher is a qualified social worker who is equipped with the skills of probing and can obtain answers for the research questions

Interview and FGD Protocols

A semi-structured interview schedule was used to obtain detailed insights into participants' experiences and perceptions of victim-offender mediation. A semi-structured interview schedule is merely a list of titles and related questions asked by the interviewer (Bearman, 2019). The interview schedule ensured that key topics related to mediation processes, parole requirements, offender rehabilitation, victim participation and reintegration outcomes were consistently addressed across all interviews. At the same time the flexible nature of semi-structured interviews allowed the researcher to probe participants' responses, seek clarification and explore emerging issues in greater depth. Given the sensitive and complex nature of victim-offender mediation the interview schedule enabled participants to freely express their views and experiences resulting in rich and nuanced data that enhanced the understanding of the phenomenon under investigation.

Ethical Considerations

Ethical issues were also strictly considered. The management of Rooigrond Correctional Centre and the Department of Correctional Services gave consent to access the research site. The Faculty of Health Sciences Research Ethics Committee (HREC) at the North-West University (ethics number NWU-00164-21-A1) gave consent. Information was provided to all participants concerning the objective of the study, voluntary nature of study participation, and their right to withdraw any time is in any case feasible. Each participant was informed through written consent. During the study, confidentiality and privacy was guaranteed; transcripts and reporting were made using pseudonyms to guard the identities of the officials used.

Data Analysis Procedures

The data were coded manually through thematic analysis, which is a versatile approach to discerning, structuring, and formulating patterns of significance in qualitative data (Villegas, 2024). As the author describes the six stages of Braun and Clarke (2013), the initial step was to get acquainted with the data through multiple readings of the transcripts of the interviews and hearing the audio files. Second, in preliminary codes have been created line by line, which have been summarized throughout the entire data set. Third, related codes were pulled into possible themes that demonstrated broad patterns, regarding the research questions. Fourth, these themes were checked and corrected against coded extracts and the entire data set to do a revision. Fifth, the themes were well defined and labelled to sum up their essence. Lastly a narrative report of the analysis was made which incorporated the themes along with applying them to the relevant literature and the objectives of the study.

To promote transparency, values of examples between codes, categories and themes were created. An example of this would include the codes of offenders frustrated, offenders want transfers and overcrowded cells, which were grouped together under the subcategory of the impact of overcrowding on social reintegration of offenders. In the same way codes such as high caseload, no cars to visit, not enough officials were placed under the resource constraints group which added to the theme the effect of overcrowding on the work of correctional officials. Such codes as the victims not counselled, victims only contacted at parole stage and victims still angry were amalgamated in the category limited victim empowerment which formed the basis of the theme measures to be taken to achieve successful reintegration of offenders. These illustrations as also given in a tabular form in findings section demonstrate the process through which the analysis proceeded in a systematic manner starting with raw data to the last themes.

The Findings

The findings have been categorised into participants' biographical details and associated themes and sub-themes. The interviews conducted with correctional officials have demonstrated that there are some measures that can reinforce offender reintegration with the help of restorative justice practices. It led to four major themes: (1) victim empowerment and counselling, (2) community education and participation, (3) multisectoral collaboration and (4) offender support and rehabilitation continuity

Table 1. Summary of participants' demographic details

Pseudonym	Age	Gender	Work experience (Years)	Workplace
Modise	49	Male	33 years	Rooigrond Correctional centre
Layla	38	Female	8 years	Rooigrond Correctional centre
Bridget	32	Female	6 years	Rooigrond Correctional centre
Keneilwe	38	Female	10 years	Rooigrond Correctional centre
Kagiso	39	Male	10 years	Rooigrond Correctional centre
Rorisang	42	Male	13 years	Rooigrond Correctional centre
Tshiamo	44	Male	20 years	Rooigrond Community Corrections Office
Kevin	59	Male	30 years	Rooigrond Community Corrections Office
Billy	49	Male	20 years	Rooigrond Community Corrections Office
Masego	43	Female	13 years	Rooigrond Community Corrections Office and Rooigrond Correctional Centre

Empowerment and Counselling of the victim / Restorative Justice.

The correctional officials mentioned that the success of restorative justice depends on victim empowerment, which is still poorly implemented. Although the White Paper on Corrections (2005) and the Department of Justice and Constitutional Development (2012) advocate the use of Victim-Offender Dialogue (VOD) and Victim-Offender Mediation (VOM) as methods of reconciling offenders, victims are regularly consulted only at the time when offenders are near parole. This is minimal involvement which causes the many victims to feel neglected and re-traumatized. Kagiso observed that:

"The department tries to contact victims before parole, but some are still angry and refuse to take part; we just record their decision for the parole board."

Similarly, Tshiamo explained that:

"Offenders get counselling from the start, but victims are left out until parole; that makes healing one-sided."

These records show that means of including the victims are not forces but responsive. The counselling process may be applied to increase the healing and balance the restorative results of the victim through early and continuous counselling. The ongoing involvement of both the Department of Social Development and Correctional Services would assist in bridging this policy-practice gap as findings by Louw (2021) indicate that the healing and responsibility that are developed when the victim actively participate helps to bridge this gap.

Table 2. Empowerment and counselling of the victim

Aspect	Main Insight	Descriptive Quote
Policy intent	VOD/VOM encourage reconciliation but without early implementation	<i>"We just record the victim's decision for the parole board."</i> (Kagiso)
Gap in implementation	The victims were called late; lack of psychological help.	<i>"Victims are left out until parole."</i> (Tshiamo)

The findings indicate a gap between the policy intention of Victim-Offender Dialogue (VOD) and Victim-Offender Mediation (VOM) and their actual implementation in practice. Although these processes are intended to promote reconciliation and give victims an opportunity to participate in the rehabilitation and parole process participants reported that victims are often only involved at a late stage particularly when parole is being considered. This limits meaningful victim participation because their views are mainly recorded and forwarded to the parole board rather than being incorporated throughout the rehabilitation process. The findings also highlight a lack of adequate psychological support for victims which may make participation difficult especially when dealing with trauma and emotional distress. This is reflected in Kagiso's statement, "We just record the victim's decision for the parole board," and Tshiamo's observation that "Victims are left out until parole." Overall, the finding suggests that VOD/VOM are not being implemented early or consistently enough to achieve their intended restorative and reconciliatory purpose.

Community Education and Participation

Respondents emphasized that acceptance of the community is central to reintegration of offenders. The stigma that is perpetually directed towards parolees has been one of the greatest hindrances towards a successful rehabilitation process. Layla stated:

"If people in the community understood that serving time means paying for wrongdoing, they would not reject ex-offenders."

This implies that in most cases communities take parole to be an unnecessary softening up. The authorities suggested civic education and awareness campaigns to enhance knowledge on principles of restorative justice. The White Paper on Corrections (2005) says that rehabilitation is not only a departmental responsibility but also a social one. Reintegration, and minimized recidivism could be brought to normal through community workshops and church and NGO collaboration.

Table 3. Community education and participation

Aspect	Main Insight	Descriptive Quote
Social attitude	Communities perceive parole as leniency.	<i>"If people understood parole, they'd be more accepting."</i> (Layla)

The finding on social attitudes shows that negative perceptions of parole within communities may influence how parole decisions and the rehabilitation of offenders are understood and accepted. The main insight is that some community members perceive parole as a form of leniency or premature release rather than as a structured process intended to support the gradual reintegration of offenders into society after they have met specific requirements. This perception may be influenced by limited public knowledge about how parole works including the role of rehabilitation, risk assessment, supervision, victim considerations and conditions attached to release. When communities do not have sufficient information about these processes they may view the release of offenders as unfair or as failing to provide justice for victims which can create resistance to reintegration and potentially contribute to stigma against parolees. Layla's statement, *"If people understood parole, they'd be more accepting,"* suggests that greater community education and awareness could help address these negative attitudes. Therefore, the finding highlights the importance of public education, transparent communication and community involvement in parole and offender reintegration processes as improving understanding may promote greater acceptance of parole while also strengthening community support for successful rehabilitation and reintegration.

Multisectoral Collaboration

Poor interdepartmental coordination was raised by the government agents as a significant drawback in the application of restorative justice. Rorisang observed:

“When an offender is sentenced, Correctional Services should deal with the offender’s emotions, and Social Development should take care of the victim immediately. Both must start together so that when parole time comes, everyone is ready.”

This assertion supports the necessity to have a multisectoral approach which encompasses the Department of Social Development, Department of Correctional Services and SAPS to offer uninterrupted psychological and social assistance to criminals and victims. This kind of collaboration would help in balancing and synchronisation of rehabilitation. Another argument made by Kholofelo and Tirivangasi (2022) discusses the power of the coordinated institutional response to maintain the restorative outcome and minimize the procedural delays.

Table 4. Multisectoral collaboration

Aspect	Main Insight	Descriptive Quote
Coordination issue	Isolated work of departments, which brings a gap in service	<i>“Social Development should take victims; Correctional Services the offenders.”</i> (Rorisang)

The finding on coordination issues highlights that different government departments involved in the rehabilitation, parole and victim-support processes often work in isolation resulting in gaps and fragmentation in service delivery. Although departments such as Social Development and Correctional Services have different responsibilities effective rehabilitation and restorative justice require these departments to communicate, coordinate, and work together to address the needs of both offenders and victims. The statement by Rorisang, *“Social Development should take victims; Correctional Services the offenders,”* reflects a perception that responsibilities are divided according to the population each department serves, with Correctional Services primarily focusing on offenders while Social Development is expected to support victims and their psychosocial needs. However, when these responsibilities are managed separately without effective referral systems, information sharing, joint planning, or regular communication victims may not receive the necessary psychological and social support while offenders may also experience fragmented rehabilitation services. This lack of coordination can therefore undermine the broader goals of rehabilitation, victim participation, restorative justice and successful reintegration into the community. The finding suggests a need for stronger interdepartmental collaboration, clearly defined roles, coordinated referral pathways and integrated services to ensure that both victims and offenders receive appropriate and continuous support throughout the rehabilitation and parole process.

Continuity of Support and Rehabilitation of the Offenders.

Those involved in the program have reported that most offenders commit crimes again because there is no post-release support and economic opportunities. They stressed that reintegration does not only be limited to the control of parole but must also incorporate empowerment and livelihood programs. Billy suggested:

“If an offender learns welding, the department should give them a welding kit so they can start small work instead of going back to crime.”

This observation is in line with the White Paper on Corrections (2005) that supports intellectual transformation of offenders via vocational training and reintegration programmes that lead to economic sustenance. Continuous employment, follow up counselling and family integration sessions were considered as important in prevention of re-offending.

Table 5. Continuity of Offender support and rehabilitation

Aspect	Main Insight	Descriptive Quote
Primary obstacle	Absence of after release empowerment tools	<i>“Give them tools to start small work instead of going back to crime.”</i> (Billy)

The finding identifies the absence of empowerment tools after release as a primary obstacle to the successful rehabilitation and reintegration of offenders into society. Although offenders may receive rehabilitation programmes while incarcerated the lack of practical support and opportunities after release can make it difficult for them to sustain positive changes and become economically independent. Without access to employment opportunities, vocational skills, entrepreneurship training, financial resources, or support to establish small businesses parolees may experience poverty, unemployment, social exclusion and dependence on others. These challenges can increase the pressure to return to previous lifestyles or engage in criminal activities particularly when individuals have families to support and limited legitimate sources of income. Billy's statement, *"Give them tools to start small work instead of going back to crime,"* emphasises the importance of providing offenders with practical and sustainable livelihood opportunities rather than focusing only on behavioural rehabilitation. The finding therefore suggests that successful reintegration should extend beyond release from correctional facilities and include continued socioeconomic support, skills development, job placement, entrepreneurship opportunities, access to resources and mentorship. Such empowerment could strengthen offenders' sense of independence and dignity, reduce the likelihood of reoffending and enable them to make a meaningful contribution to their families and communities.

All the findings prove that in South Africa, restorative justice models do exist, but they are applied inconsistently and in reactive mode. In their counselling process, marginalisation of the victims, lack of information by the communities, and functioning in silos amongst departments. Restorative justice would be mostly an imaginary proposition without a coordinated victim support, constant empowerment and community involvement. Consequently, reintegration should take the form of holistic reintegration comprising three pillars, early relations with the victim, community education and multisectoral cooperation which should be economically enriched with ex-offenders.

Discussion

Its main results were that although VOD can potentially result in reconciliation and the alleviation of recidivism, its present application is usually not up to the restorative justice intentions. The participants emphasized that the victims are rarely approached during initial phases of the justice mechanism and are only reached when the offenders are to be paroled. This intervention is an insult to integrity and victims will not be ready to confront offenders which will destroy future healing process that restorative justice aims to enhance. VOD has no transformative potential because of the ultimate lack of uniformly applied victim empowerment and counselling, with victims still emotionally challenged and left without a chance to take relevant part.

The assessment of these results in the context of the existing literature shows that the application of VOD in the correctional facilities is not precisely consistent with the theoretical recommendations of the idea of restorative justice. Gustafson (2018) and Valdivia (2023) suggest that restorative justice presupposes victims and offenders to participate in a process of mutual understanding and amendment as well as communities, in a collaborative and voluntary manner. The research, however, discovered that the victim engagement process is mostly procedural as opposed to being therapeutic as it is usually conducted to fulfil the parole conditions. Such negligence in providing initial and sustained support will lead to re-experiencing trauma among the victims and the lower chances of true forgiveness. According to the theory of reintegrative shaming provided by Braithwaite et al., (2018), it is necessary to reintegrate society by being sympathetic and inclusive instead of being stigmatized and excluded to truly be rehabilitated. The research findings are one of the confirmations that parolees are not accepted in the communities, and those offenders rejecting them can reoffend due to disempowerment and unresolved trauma.

It is also found out that the application of VOD is not reflective of the restorative conceptions of the White Paper on Corrections in South Africa (2005). The White Paper supports rehabilitation as communal societal responsibility that incorporates the victims, offenders, and the communities to restore dignity and citizenship. In reality, it has been turned into a reactive, administrative type of a process, aimed more as a way of meeting the parole conditions, rather than actual restoration. Such inconsistency is evidence of a lack of connection between policy and implementation, where restorative justice is perceived as something of

happening rather than as a continuous process. In addition, inadequate monitoring and evaluation of counselling services to the victims lack systematicity and decrease accountability and transparency of the parole system. Louw (2021) also found that the level of participation of victims is generally inconsistent across the correctional centres because of the lack of institutional capacity and the poor interdepartmental cooperation.

The reinforcement of the connection between the research results and the restorative justice theory points to a change between the offender-centred and the more victim-focused approach. The restorative model focuses more on healing, responsibility, and reintegration of all the parties whose lives have been impacted by crime, but the existing model gives more preference to offender rehabilitation than victim recovery. The paper highlights the importance of creating formal victim support networks under the administration of Department of Social Development closely working with the Department of Correctional Services. Ownership of the victims can be achieved by early intervention which includes counselling, trauma therapy and mediation which in turn facilitates forgiveness and increase the success of VOD in reintegration. Restorative justice in this manner would not only go beyond a process mandate that would necessitate parole but would be an ongoing process to restore trust, responsibility and social peace.

Conclusion

The research found that Victim-Offender Dialogue (VOD) could be useful to aid offender rehabilitation, nonetheless, it is under viable to fulfil emotional and mental demands of victims. It was discovered that when rehabilitation and counselling are offered to offenders on a regular basis during their incarceration, very little is done to assist the victims, and they are only contacted when they are nearing parole. Such a tardy entry can cause the impression of exclusion, secondary victimisation and therefore, frustrates the role of restorative justice, which aims to redress wrongs and renew connections.

It was also clear that reintegration plan of successful ones relies on the empowering and healing of both offenders and victims. Under the circumstances where victims are not held in priority, it becomes challenging to forgive, and the victim remains resentful resulting in poor relations within the society and increased chances of recidivism. A key observation is that the Department of Social Development working together with the Department of Correctional Services ought to make sure that the victims are timely counselled and psychosocial assisted once a crime is committed. VOD can only achieve desired restorative and reconciliatory effects when the victims are heard and made to feel supported. It is therefore concluded in the study that VOD should move beyond being a parole formality and becoming an ongoing and therapeutic process that adheres to the restorative justice principles. Early intervention, regular counselling, and active involvement of the victims would empower them besides encouraging healing and serve as the affirmation it would give to the correctional system.

The introduction of policies that protect and empower victims in through the White Paper on Corrections (2005) is recommended within the realms of the Department of Correctional Services. The Department of Social Development should be coerced to provide periodic reports on the progress of the victims who have undergone counselling by social workers to maintain accountability and continuity of care. Also, parole ought to have a balancing factor in the process that puts into consideration not only the rehabilitation of the offender, but also the emotional healing of the victim. Parole should be awarded based on the willingness of the offender and the degree within which the victim has been enabled and assisted. The safeguarding of fairness and emotional healing in case of victims will turn the VOD into a symbolic practice into a particularly restorative and social constructive practice.

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