

An Exploration of Trauma-Informed Practices in Restorative Justice: A Phenomenological Study

Aaron Pycroft & Claudia Christen-Schneider

Abstract

While several studies define trauma as a main risk factor for developing offending behaviour, the criminal justice system still largely ignores the problem and the same seems to be true for restorative justice. This article offers a critical exploration of trauma-informed work with offenders using Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis. The interviewees perceive a growing interest in the topic of trauma and trauma-informed care. However, they also identify several areas that seem to hinder a trauma-informed approach, not only with offenders but also with victims. One concern is the tendency to institutionalise restorative justice with an emphasis on efficiency, effectiveness and outcome-orientation. Interviewees also perceive a revengeful and retributive attitude in their societies that does not condone restorative measures that seemingly favour offenders. This tendency appears even stronger in societies that have suffered from collaborative trauma and have not recovered from it. Interviewees therefore advocate for raising awareness of trauma, the consequences of unhealed trauma and the need to work trauma-informed with all stakeholders, including offenders and the extended, affected community. They also appeal to increase training for practitioners in trauma-informed care *and* self-care as these areas seem essential to provide safe and beneficial processes for all stakeholders.

Keywords: Restorative Justice, trauma, trauma-informed care, Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis

1. Introduction

Several studies identify trauma as the ‘main risk factor for the development of offending behaviour’ (Ko et al., 2008; Walsh, 2007), however, despite some notable developments in practice, criminal justice systems (CJS) grounded in retribution and deterrence still (perhaps not surprisingly) largely ignore the concept and its consequences (Oudshoorn, 2015:159). The question arises, whether the same is true of restorative justice, which claims, according to the core meaning of the word ‘restoration’, to offer a ‘healing form of justice’ (Weitekamp & Parmentier, 2016:142; Van Ness & Strong, 2015:43). If this is still true – why? Based on restorative justice’s aims, it appears that trauma-informed care (TIC) should form part of its practices (Randall & Haskell, 2013:533) as it supports restorative justice’s aim of addressing the underlying causes of crime (UNODC, 2020:7). This research offers a critical and original exploration, through the use of Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA), of practitioner perceptions of trauma-informed restorative justice practices and their implementation in working with

offenders across seven continents. The paper concludes by summarising recommendations for practice and areas for further research.

2. Trauma-informed practice

The transference of trauma has gained the attention of scholars since research shows a high prevalence of trauma in people caught up in the criminal justice system (Kerig, Chaplo, Bennett & Modrowski, 2016) with up to 90% of prisoners having suffered trauma, in many cases severe developmental or complex trauma, during their early years of life (Oudshoorn, 2015; Miller & Najavits, 2012). Unhealed trauma can affect the mental health of survivors and incite self-destructive behaviour and violence, promote substance abuse and affect how survivors relate to others (Honorato et al., 2016; Walsh, 2007; Oudshoorn, 2015:168-169). Traumatized people often struggle to feel others' pain and may not even care about it due to 'impaired empathy' (Greenwald, 2009:ix). Especially in young people, trauma can affect their anger regulation (Ikpe & Coker, 2010:225), which, combined with substance abuse, can result in violence towards others (Honorato et al., 2016:8). Consequently, much offending is a result of trauma (Zehr, 2004:308) and there exists a reciprocal relationship between offending behaviour and trauma (Kerig et al, 2016).

Healing the harm caused by crime lies at the heart of restorative justice and Zehr (2002) urges us to address the harms suffered by victims *and* offenders. Nevertheless, the emphasis often lies more on victim-healing (Ikpe & Coker, 2010:226) and rarely provides opportunities to explore offenders' harms and needs as survivors nor prevent *their* re-victimisation (Toews & Katounas, 2004). Bearing in mind that restorative justice further aims to address the underlying causes of crime (Zehr, 2002:23), it seems fundamental for restorative justice to foster trauma-healing in *all* stakeholders, even more so as trauma-healing apparently helps to reduce recidivism, which is often a primary goal of correctional policies (Miller & Najavits, 2012:5). However, despite restorative justice being seen to cover a plethora of community practices and studied within the framework of 'what works' (see Sherman, Strange, Mayo-Wilson and Ariel 2015, who argue that the problem is empirical rather than conceptual) crime reduction itself is rarely defined as an explicit goal of restorative justice (Ward & Langlands, 2009:206). We argue for a non-reductionist and 'multi-dimensional', approach that focuses equally on all stakeholders (Daly, 2000) and their needs, supporting the healing of everyone affected and strive towards justice (Zehr, 2002; Van Ness & Strong, 2015). In this sense, trauma-informed

approaches are offered potentially as a defining principle of restorative justice but which currently is insufficiently conceptualised in practice.

Many of restorative justice's goals are common to trauma-informed approaches. Being trauma-informed means being aware of trauma, recognising and acknowledging its impact on survivors (Randall & Haskell, 2013). Addressing survivors' needs, promoting healing, resilience, self-care and transformation are primary goals, along with preventing re-traumatisation and further harm (Randall & Haskell, 2013:505; NCTIC, 2013:3; Oudshoorn, 2015:160). TIC is not professional trauma therapy; rather it aims to educate professionals about trauma and how trauma shapes people's behaviour and belief systems. Acknowledging the far-reaching consequences for survivors' lives, validating their experiences, getting to the root causes of violence and abuse, and developing suitable, knowledge-based interventions are key components (Patterson et al., 2013:316; Randall & Haskell, 2013). Respectful, supportive and strength-based approaches are required, as well as an environment that nurtures safety, trust, collaboration, empathy and empowerment (Patterson et al., 2013:316-317). TIC further aims to help survivors cope with future adverse situations and foster desistance in offenders (Oudshoorn, 2015:175).

3.1. Aims of the research

The study aimed to:

1. Develop an understanding of a range of perspectives of TIC within restorative justice as practised on different continents;
2. Explore those restorative justice practitioners' understanding of TIC within restorative justice;
3. Understand the extent to which the principles of TIC inform the practice of those participants and their limitations;
4. Identify potential improvements in the delivery of trauma-informed restorative justice practices.

3.2. Research design

Hermeneutical phenomenology is non-reductive in method (see Pycroft, 2018) eschewing the imposition of research categories. Therefore, in methodological terms, rather than having tightly formulated research questions there is a framework for

exploration that allows for an emergence of lived experience as an act(s) of consciousness. In phenomenology things, objects, themes that are not consciously addressed remain merely manifest (taken for granted), those which are acted upon are given (see Polizzi and Draper, 2013). Therefore, the researcher is seeking an uncovering (*Aletheia*) of the contours of practice in restorative justice in relation to TIC through what is given in an encounter with the other in an engagement with restorative justice practitioners. To achieve our phenomenological aims, Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA), a qualitative, inductive research method based on phenomenology, hermeneutics and idiography (Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2014) was chosen as a useful research framework to allow for exploration and detail in data collection and a richness and depth in findings (Pycroft, Wallis, Bigg & Webster, 2013:4). It is important to remember that IPA (as with any heuristic framework) seeks to approximate reality but is not reality itself, and to treat it as such is to be guilty of the epistemic fallacy that is common to reductionist research methods (see Pycroft, 2014). In IPA's 'dynamic process', the researcher's own knowledge and interpretation of the phenomena play an active role (Smith & Osborne, 2007:53), leading to a 'double hermeneutic' (Smith & Osborne, 2007:53), that prompts a 'dynamic' and 'iterative' interpretation process. Our focus is on the researcher being a part of (thoroughly immersed in), rather than separate from the research process, resulting in a co-construction of findings (Shinebourne, 2011:21) and a 'cyclical' and continuous process (Oxley, 2016:56). This process in line with the hermeneutical phenomenology of Heidegger (1962) therefore rejects the process of bracketing in favour of engagement as a process of knowing (see Tufford and Newman, 2010) or unconcealment. Bracketing is an approach based upon consciousness *of* things rather than *in* things (see Pycroft, 2018), in that it seeks to remove the researcher and their preconceptions from the area of study (in positivist terms these preconceptions are seen as confounding variables). In this research, the *dasein* (literally being-in-the-world) of the interviewer and their lived experience with TIC in restorative justice is crucial in realising the potential of new knowledge (these are principles of conjunction rather than disjunction - see Pycroft, 2014).

3.3. Recruitment and participants

Sampling sizes in IPA are small (between five and fifteen) and participants selected purposefully based on their expertise and knowledge of the research topic (Morse, Barrett, Mayan, Olson & Spiers, 2002). Accordingly, 12 expert restorative justice

practitioners were chosen, from the lead author's networks of practice, two from each continent, i.e. North and South America, Asia, Africa, Europe and Oceania. Semi-structured interviews were used to provide insight into practitioners' personal experiences and perceptions. All interviews were carried out and transcribed in English by the lead author. It is usual to include some demographic data (anonymised) on each participant to allow for further context on who is speaking and their potential meanings. This request was also a key requirement for research ethics approval. However, some of the participants are working in volatile and sensitive environments where they could be potentially recognisable and therefore at risk and have asked that no information be provided. The majority of interviewees are working for more than 15 years in the field. Four participants were female and eight participants were male. All of them are experienced practitioners and half of them additionally work as academics.

The questionnaire was topic-based. Interviewees were asked to describe their experience with restorative justice and their current practice. The aim was to explore whether they work in a trauma-informed way and if so, to discover how they provide trauma-care to offenders, how they define trauma and TIC, and what importance they ascribe to working trauma-informed with offenders. Next, interviewees were asked how prepared they felt to offer this kind of service. The discussion then shifted to how they perceive their society's view of offenders, whether or not their needs are deemed legitimate. Interviewees were further asked whether the cultural, historical, social, political or legal context, as well as demographic aspects, have an influence on how society perceives restorative practices and on how offenders are treated within restorative practices. The interview then explored whether interviewees felt that working trauma-informed might enhance restorative justice, and if so, how, or why not. They were then asked how they would define best practice in restorative justice. The next topic explored the emphasis on trauma-informed care for offenders in their region, whether this is an issue at all. The interview ended with their final suggestions or comments on how they believe the issue should be addressed in restorative justice.

4. Research Findings and Analysis

It is argued by Smith and Osborne (2007) and Brocki and Wearden (2006) that IPA is not a prescriptive methodology, but one which is adaptive and is not simply about categorising the data; the analysis requires the analyst to both closely interact with the text whilst utilising their own interpretative resources. In practice, a range of

interpretative resources based on the interview texts, the insights of the interviewer, and an academic perspective familiar with research, models and theories were utilised. A key aspect of IPA is to read and re-read the transcripts continuously to identify ideas, patterns and emerging themes. These are then compared iteratively with the other transcripts and bundled into super-ordinate themes and sub-themes. Super-ordinate themes represent a higher-order consideration, constituted by sub-themes, which are approximated based on data saturation having been reached. Thereafter, a narrative report is created that describes, links and inter-relates the findings (Duff, 2011:233). For each sub-theme, relevant literature is annotated to be used later for making comparisons between findings in literature and empirical research. Out of this grows an interpretative process where data is analysed, findings compared, contrasted and presented as such and then cross-referenced, compared and contrasted with relevant findings from literature (Biggam, 2015:191). Throughout this whole process, the researcher continuously goes back to the transcripts to check if there is any more information regarding the themes at stake and take note of these in achieving data saturation. Brocki and Wearden (2006) identify the problem of knowing when to finish data collection and argue that it is perhaps completed when coherence, integration and construction of a persuasive story have been achieved.

The findings are presented to develop as full an understanding as possible of each theme and its dimensional nature. Rather than separating out (a process of disjunction) the quotations of the ‘participants’ and the bracketed thoughts of ‘the researcher’, which are then discussed in the light of ‘the literature’, these are presented in conjunction to reveal the emergent findings and our state of knowledge.

4.1. Super-ordinate and sub-themes

Super-ordinate themes	Sub-themes
The socio-political context of TIC in practice	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The influence of TIC in restorative justice - Public attitude to addressing crime - Lack of public understanding of restorative justice - Institutionalising restorative justice
The importance of TIC in furthering restorative justice practice	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The connection between trauma and offending behaviour - Consequences of unhealed trauma - Labels are not useful

Developing ‘best practice’ in offering TIC in restorative justice practice	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Narrative approach - Providing safety - Empowering participants
Requirements for furthering the use of TIC in restorative justice	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The need for trauma awareness for all practitioners - Multidisciplinary collaboration and training - Vicarious trauma and self-healing - Training and credentialing

4.2. Super-ordinate theme: The socio-political context of TIC in practice

The first super-ordinate theme highlights the extent and understanding of the context for trauma-informed care in restorative justice and the potential limitations on its uses in practice. The narrative is very much concerned with the challenges of establishing restorative justice practice and having it accepted as being difficult and without the discourse of TIC, which presents further challenges to retributive thinking and attitudes. This sets the context for the emerging discussion.

4.2.1. Sub-theme: the influence of TIC in restorative justice

This research shows that the majority of interviewees currently claim to work in a trauma-informed way with offenders; several, however, share that this has not been the case from the beginning. Interviewees caution that the fact their programmes are trauma-informed does not necessarily represent the majority of restorative justice programmes in their regions. They generally observe little trauma-informed practice with offenders, although ‘[n]ow it is fairly common knowledge that offending behaviour sometimes grows out of trauma. However, it’s not a big issue here’ (Europe 1).

The vast majority of cases are diversions from the courts... and many of those programmes are not aware of trauma...yet, restorative justice programmes that are dealing with serious and violent crime at the prison level do have trauma-informed practice. However, these cases are the fewest going through restorative justice right now.... (North America 1).

Africa 2 reflects on how trauma-informed restorative justice programmes with offenders cannot be generalised to all of Africa. Some programmes take trauma very seriously and have well-prepared staff, yet not all programmes are trauma-informed to

the same extent, nor are they necessarily in a Western way of understanding. Restorative justice is apparently in its initial phase in Asia and still has a long way to go. Although Asia 2 observes a revival of traditional, community-based approaches ‘largely based on restorative justice principles and values’, he fears these lack trauma-care for offenders. Whereas Asia 1 notices a slowly growing interest in trauma care in the Northeast, Asia 2 rarely witnesses that same focus in Southeast Asia.

Participants concur that interest in TIC is growing worldwide, but that this has little impact on practice and that trauma-informed care is still a novelty for many restorative justice programmes (Randall & Haskell, 2013:505). Consequently, Toews and Katounas’ (2004:109) perception that restorative justice often fails to acknowledge offenders’ traumatic experiences still seems accurate.

4.2.2. Sub-theme: Public attitude to addressing crime

A key discussion revolves around contextual factors related to culture, politics and religion. Some interviewees perceive their societies as quite revengeful and hateful, approving retributive over restorative measures. The European participants relate this to the growth of penal populism and retributive attitudes. They propose that if collaborative trauma and a society’s history can affect the use of restorative justice approaches then this becomes even more likely for TIC. Europe 2 suggests that

unhealed trauma influence[s] the way society is relating to offenders or victims... this principle, eye for an eye, is very deep in our society, and I think the reason is because it is a traumatised society...

Europe 1, whose nation has gone through a long-lasting armed conflict, notices how ‘restorative justice developed very quickly in our society as a reaction to political violence’, nevertheless, ‘[w]e’re sort of frozen, stuck in a narrative of harm or collective trauma’. He wonders:

Can there be a community-based restorative practice movement that is not associated with violence, but with recovering, healthy communities? What does it mean to have a traumatised community, this collective and intergenerational trauma that is passed on (Europe 1)?

These are essential questions to ponder, as it seems that not only individual but also societal healing promoted through TIC is very much needed after traumatic events, since collective trauma can cause long-lasting effects upon society. The belief in a

‘basically benevolent world [...] can be quickly shattered [...] and] feelings of basic safety of the world can erode’ (Franco, 2020). The big difference to individual trauma is that collective trauma ‘can change the entire fabric of a community’ (Erikson, 1976) and thus greatly ‘impact relationships, alter policies and governmental processes, alter the way the society functions, and even change its social norms’ (Render, 2020). This can lead to increased vigilance in the face of threats and thus ‘justify, and legitimize political violence’ (Hirschberger, 2018). This again affects also criminal policies.

Overall, the prevailing opinion was that the provision of TIC across countries is limited and that the capacity of the different systems to deal with trauma in offenders is considered to be very low, given time constraints and rigid processes. Oceania 1 believes governmental restorative justice programmes are ‘just scratching the peripheral in terms of any harm that comes to be resolved’, and Oceania 2 perceives no formal structure is in place to deal with trauma. South America 1 does not ‘believe that the CJS has the tools to address trauma and shame within the court system’. Oceania 2 considers the system’s limitations also affect practitioners, limiting their possibilities to address the needs of traumatised offenders. Both Asian participants notice how several Asian societies have changed significantly over the past decades. Whereas in the past many Asian cultures dealt with harm through community-based approaches, individualised and legal methods for resolving crime and conflict have become predominant in some countries. Asia 1 observes how a punitive approach makes more sense within globalisation and neo-liberalism and thus meets the expectations of his society, although their traditional culture ‘should be more community-oriented’. He believes it will take ‘time to convince the public to have more restorative programmes in the court level or legal system’. More approval exists in educational settings. Restorative justice should also be culturally embraced in South America 1’s country, for he believes it is part of their nature. Yet, because of the political situation and corruption, he currently sees a thirst for retributive punishment instead of reparation.

4.2.3. Sub-theme: Lack of public understanding of restorative justice

Various interviewees mention the lack of information among the public as hindering restorative justice’s growth and hence TIC. North America 1 believes restorative justice is not used as often due to ‘a lack of public support and education’. South America 2 agrees that people become more supportive once they know more about restorative justice. This applies also to victims, according to Oceanic interviewees. Oceania 1 observes that

once victims actually engage in the process, they view it a little bit differently and become a little bit more supportive... they're more likely to support the process and spreading the word a little, perhaps.

Oceania 2 shares that same experience:

For those who come in contact with it [restorative justice], they have generally very positive views... But most people I come to, that I talk to and where I mention the term, I would say only three or four out of ten people, probably 30-40%, would have significant awareness of it, so it is not really well understood.

Even many victims who have been offered a restorative process only have a limited understanding of restorative justice's aims (Hoyle & Fonseca, 2016:38). Studies from Australia and the UK show a generally high approval of restorative justice among the public, but only 28% know about restorative justice (Moore, 2012; RJ Council, 2016). Accordingly, with more information, more victims might choose to access restorative justice, even after serious crime (Walters, 2015:1222).

However, there is yet another aspect that may impede the growth of restorative justice, even more so when considering offenders' needs and traumatisation. As abovementioned, many interviewees perceive a rather punitive attitude among society towards offenders. Offenders must 'pay for the wrong done' and 'have no right. Their humanity is inconsiderate' (South America 2).

I think we've become very revengeful and hateful and, yeah, it's not just about locking people up and putting them in prison. Our communities believe they should receive nothing while they are there [... because] it always seems that when we do, we pitch it against victims (Oceania 1).

North America 1 though observes that when the public is better informed, and 'learn more about the unique situations, they can be more compassionate to the underlying issues'. Also, in some parts of Africa it seems that there is a deeper understanding that punishment 'will never break the cycle of revenge'. The focus seems stronger on rehumanization and restoration because people understand they

are interconnected as human being and we're interdependent and relationship is what matters and that we cannot live alone. It's sort of like the concept of Ubuntu... and this is very deeply ingrained in many parts of African cosmology (Africa 2).

It appears, therefore, that society's worldview also matters when it comes to public support of restorative justice.

4.2.4. Sub-theme: Institutionalising restorative justice

Restorative justice's institutionalisation and the resulting consequences emerge as a concern in many interviews. Europe 1 witnesses how the wish to do things quickly and cheaply endangers the quality of restorative justice services. Oceania 1 calls restorative justice's institutionalisation and the resulting outcome-orientation 'an abuse of restorative justice' that 'seem to rip the heart out of [it]'. Under such circumstances, a focus on trauma and healing becomes less likely for *both* victims and offenders. Europe 1 also feels practice in his region has become diluted and fears such an approach to restorative justice could be worse than doing nothing. 'We need to think how we maintain the quality of process that deals with these issues of trauma without saying that everybody needs to be a trauma therapist' (Europe 1).

The South American participants witness a similar inclination in which restorative justice tends to concentrate rather on conflict-solving than in providing a holistic approach.

Most restorative justice programmes focus only on the procedure... there is a great risk of restorative justice being co-opted by the system to do more of the same... wanting to obtain quantitative results in a short time, usually to meet a political demand (South America 2).

However,

Attending to trauma and shame is a premise of the principle of addressing harm in restorative justice, so for me, it's a given if you're not addressing harm through addressing trauma and shame, you're not achieving anything but a mere surface process (South America 1).

North America 1 adds to this and explains that working this way may even be dangerous:

We need to look underneath what we are seeing and hearing: anger, resistance, shame, sadness, depression. We need to be aware of the symptoms related to PTSD, so we can provide support to our clients and do not ask them to do things that they can't handle or, worse, trigger their PTSD and cause further harm. So, that said, trauma-informed care means that we know enough about the signs of

trauma so that we don't put people at risk such as inviting them to participate in a process they are not ready for or are supported to do.

This presents a big challenge to the practice of restorative justice. While the institutionalisation of restorative justice and its inclusion into the CJS promoted its growth (Suzuki & Wood, 2017:274), it can also limit its practice and lead to a process and outcome-orientation that reduces restorative justice to the above-mentioned conflict-solving exercise. Instead of focusing on a dialogue-driven process 'with emphasis upon victim empowerment, offender accountability, and restoration of losses' (Umbreit & Greenwood, 2000:2), there is a tendency towards a McDonaldisation of processes, favouring 'efficiency, calculability, predictability, and control' above human needs (Ritzer, 2019:21-23). This endangers the core values of restorative justice. Pavlich (2009:24) thus recognises restorative justice's limitation within 'state justice agencies', as such can lead to a collision between traditional and restorative justice values and goals (Zernova, 2007:3), and ultimately conflict with victims' and offenders' needs (Suzuki & Wood, 2017:274). As many restorative justice programmes still depend on collaboration with and resources from governmental justice agencies, there is a key issue of preventing restorative justice from becoming co-opted and losing its core values and goals. This presents a concern in many places, particularly where restorative justice has advanced significantly and become part of governmental programmes.

4.3. Super-ordinate theme: The importance of TIC in furthering restorative justice practice

This theme explores the importance practitioners ascribe to TIC for offenders and the reasons for this in relation to a holistic approach that moves beyond the imposition of differentiating labels such as 'offender' and 'victim'.

4.3.1. Sub-theme: The connection between trauma and offending behaviour

The vicious cycle of crime represents a central reason why interviewees ascribe so much importance to TIC. Europe 2 has found 'a lot of traumatic events in the past of these young offenders'. This concurs with Europe 1 who also notices how many of the young people had

experienced traumatic events but were never offered the security and help needed... It could be the trauma of violence or being abused, by parents or other

people, physically or sexually abused... That led to the fear of shaming and they had to protect themselves from it. The more they become tough, partook in gangs, or protected themselves, the more negative the reactions towards them by the community and the more vicious the cycle (Europe 1).

As a consequence of victimization, several interviewees observe recurrently the same four reaction patterns of withdrawal, avoidance, attacking self and others such as Nathanson (1992) defines in his compass of shame. Accordingly, South America 2 believes someone

who does not feel belonging, including respect, etc. and has trauma, has a greater propensity to enter into criminality because he often does not know another way of 'empowering himself' and attending to his immediate needs.

Young people's survival strategies after suffering from severe trauma are well-known to Europe 1, who describes how they tend to mask their pain with substance abuse, self-aggression and 'becoming tough'. Asia 1 recalls meeting several prisoners who all had gone through very difficult times in their early years and had no experience of dealing with their trauma in healthy ways. It seems therefore fundamental to provide trauma-care to offenders, as a lack of healing presents a high risk of recidivism (South America 2) since it is hardly possible for survivors to move on without healing from trauma and shame (South America 1). Therefore, 'we have to start to work with trauma healing in our work with violence, we really do' (Africa 2).

Based on her personal experience, Oceania 1 shares how trauma healing indeed makes a difference:

I think once the trauma is addressed, there is no more reason to go on doing the things that we were doing previously. There is no more reason to be covering up the wound...

4.3.2. Sub-theme: Consequences of unhealed trauma

As indicated earlier, all interviewees consider TIC for offenders an essential aspect of restorative justice. Especially as many have observed how trauma can severely and persistently affect survivors who have not received adequate support. Thus, no matter who has suffered trauma, there must be a therapeutic response (Europe 1) because unhealed trauma always gets back to us somehow (Asia 2).

South America 2 observed that,

if the offender is not cared for in his trauma, there is a great risk of re-engaging in situations of violence, mainly feeling that he is being wronged. Like this, unhealed trauma will be acted out on self or others (North America 2).

Therefore, ‘if you don’t pay attention and don’t work with the traumatic events... you cannot expect empathy towards other people because they [offenders] need their own support’ (Europe 2). Because ‘being traumatised and not recovering from it... cut[s] off the ability to empathise’ (Europe 1). Wilson and Herrnstein (1985) similarly described offenders’ ‘lack of empathy for others’ as a ‘primary cause of criminal behaviour’ (paraphrased in Maruna 2014:6). Pepinsky (1998:144-146) thus proposes ‘that we become safe with others essentially when our relations become empathetic’ because ‘violence begins in a state of dissociation or detachment from the feelings, needs and wishes of the person to be victimised’. It seems therefore hardly surprising that empathy-building presents a common feature in restorative justice literature and offender-management programmes (RESTORE, 2010). Consequently, South America 2 identifies TIC for offenders as essential ‘to break the cycle of violence’, since ‘hurt people hurt people’ (North America 2).

4.3.3. *Sub-theme: Labels are not useful*

Interviewees agree that restorative justice needs to be practised holistically to live up to its aims of addressing the needs of all stakeholders. This includes addressing *everyone’s* experiences of trauma and shame. If restorative justice fails to do so, South America 1 doubts that it can achieve its full potential, as we then ‘are overlooking very important aspects of the principle of addressing harm in restorative justice’.

As many offenders have also been victimised, it is ‘crucial to recognise the full dimension of a person’s experience’ (Oceania 2). A holistic, trauma-informed restorative justice practice should thus refrain from labelling people as ‘victims’ or ‘offenders’ since all are human beings in need of healing (South America 1). McLaughlin (2001:169) likewise indicates that ‘labelled individuals are stereotyped to act in certain ways’ and ‘[s]uch reaction tends to reinforce a self-conception as deviant... promoting the behaviour it is designed to prevent’.

Oceania 2 reiterates the importance of refraining from labelling participants in restorative justice processes so that offenders can feel safe and free to share about their own victimisation, as telling one’s story is critical to healing from trauma (Herman, 1997:70). Eriksson (2013:9) likewise discourages practitioners from labelling participants, as the ‘line between victim and offender’ is not always easy to trace. To

allow participants to partake as multifaceted human beings and refrain from ‘assigning them their roles’ seems indeed crucial when we aim to provide safe and holistic restorative justice processes that include trauma care for all stakeholders. It demands to look beyond the mere acts and see the person behind it and adapt the process to their needs. Since every person and case is different, a trauma-informed restorative justice practice thus cannot be provided through a scripted, one-fits-all approach. It requires a holistic and flexible process, based on restorative justice values (South America 2 & North America 1) which is sensitive to participants’ needs, context, culture and faith (Asia 2; see also SAMHSA 2014). This demands ‘a very tailored process by skilled practitioners’ (North America 2) who are knowledgeable of trauma (North America 1). The process further needs to fit offenders with ‘limited linguistic and empathetic abilities’ as a ‘significant proportion of young [offenders] have learning disabilities or are within an autistic spectrum and have severe problems with empathy’ (Europe 1).

4.4. Super-ordinate theme: Developing ‘best practice’ in offering TIC in restorative justice practice

This theme explores the relationship between personal development and healing and the necessity of formal training programmes in becoming a practitioner working with TIC in restorative justice.

4.4.1. Sub-theme: Narrative approach

Interviewees affirm the use of a narrative approach to TIC, as they believe it supports survivors in making sense of their painful experiences (Yoder, 2005) and foments healing ‘through understanding, compassion and relationship building’ (Goodson & Gill, 2014:196). They explain how in the case of offenders a narrative approach includes addressing both the harm and shame experienced as also the harm committed. According to Europe 1, a narrative approach is necessary to grasp ‘how a traumatic event can disrupt your life’s narrative’, and from there help participants to ‘complete the narrative of harm to subsequently continue the narrative they desire for their lives’. Therefore, ‘their narrative often becomes a narrative of offending and rehabilitation’ (Europe 1). Interviewees’ considerations reflect recommendations found in literature. Zehr (2008:5) considers that narratives and ‘re-storying – play critical roles in... trauma recovery and restorative justice’. Maruna (1997, para. 51) proposes re-storying also supports desistance from criminal behaviour, as self-narratives shape our

behaviour and ‘perceived reality’. Since self-narratives can be reconstructed, he ponders re-storying particularly important with teenagers, as ‘disorganised’ early narratives correspond with high rates of criminal behaviour’. Their self-understanding and narrative shape their view of ‘reality’ and, based on that constructed reality, a ‘senseless’ crime can ultimately make perfect sense to them. It is therefore vital to reconstruct their understanding of self and re-narrate their story, as such systematic change in identity and self-conception can be critical to desistance (Maruna, 1997).

Storytelling, accordingly, presents an essential ingredient in TIC and restorative justice. Asia 1 emphasises the importance of community-based processes because individualised processes miss out on the healing power of community, as Herman likewise recommends (1997:133). The healing power of community might be an area worth to explore further in restorative justice, since, according to studies, connection to the community seems to be ‘linked to positive outcomes for trauma survivors’ (Schultz et al, 2016:44).

Nonetheless, community-based processes require careful preparation. Europe 2 considers it thus important to give ‘enough time and space to share and creating a safe space for people to share and to relate to each other’s traumatic events’. Because to feel safe is indeed vital for trauma survivors (Herman, 1997:155) and ‘a pre-condition to healing’ (Yoder, 2005:48).

4.4.2. Sub-theme: Providing safety

North America 1 also believes that ‘being trauma-informed is about safety’, allowing survivors to ‘share and participate in engaged and healthy ways’. Thus,

trauma-informed care means that we know enough about the signs of trauma so that we don’t put people at risk, such as inviting them to participate in a process they are not ready for or are supported to do.

This prerequisite for creating safe spaces reverberates throughout the interviews. North America 2 agrees with North America 1 that safety requires practitioners to recognise and understand trauma, receive ongoing training to deal appropriately with its symptoms, and avoid triggering more trauma.

Their suggestions reflect SAMHSA’s (2014) key principles for TIC. Relationships in prison, however, hardly provide that ‘safe space for vulnerable disclosure’ (RESTORE, 2010, para.3). Creating such an environment thus presents a primary task for correctional services (Miller & Najavits, 2012; Patterson et al., 2013), as feeling safe is critical for discharging shame constructively to avoid a vicious cycle of

violence (Rossner, 2008:1741). Interviewees support this view and acknowledge that offenders first need to feel safe before they can deal with their shame constructively, particularly in group-settings (Asia 1). Building that safe space thus requires trust and relationship, which often ‘may start with a one-to-one [work] and then go slowly into the group’ (Europe 2). The final goal is to help offenders feel safe enough so that they can ‘discharge their shame, rather than protect [them] from the shame’ (Europe 1). Yet, not everybody may be ready for such a process; safety, therefore, also involves choosing carefully who is indeed ready for a particular process (Africa 2). Participants thus ought to know exactly what they agree to, feel no pressure for participation and receive appropriate support (North America 1). For Ross (2006:30), safety further encompasses to be ‘safe’ as a practitioner, which means to have healed one’s self first.

4.4.3. Sub-theme: Empowering participants

For South America 2, ‘trauma treatment of all involved is important to break the cycle of violence and empower people and communities’. To achieve such empowering trauma-informed approaches, grass-root level healing-processes seem far more effective, according to South America 1 and Africa 2’s experiences, particularly when involving large groups. They are very powerful ‘because this is the people owning the process and saying we will heal ourselves’ (Africa 2). He explains:

to have a truly restorative process, all sides need to come into the room... you want to bring both of them [victimised community and offenders] into the process in an impartial way, and in a way that’s empowering and fair for all sides (Africa 2).

Top-down approaches, on the contrary, lack legitimacy for South America 1, as they tend to ‘become less about the people themselves and more about the outcome of whatever institution initiated it’. The empowerment of victims and offenders, often regarded as an essential aspect of restorative justice, thus seems key in trauma-informed processes. So while the need for grassroots-approaches certainly is of particular importance in socio-culturally shaped conflicts (Zehr & Gohar, 2003), it should also constitute a general concern of restorative processes. Here, too, it is essential that those affected can participate in shaping the process. This kind of flexibility is also affirmed by the UN Handbook (2020:65), which states that

[it] is important to ensure that the restorative process and the type of dialogue being proposed are sufficiently flexible to adapt to the needs, capabilities and cultural traditions of a wide range of victims and perpetrators.

Thus, the needs of the ones directly affected should always be at the centre of any process.

4.5. Super-ordinate theme: Requirements for furthering the use of TIC in restorative justice

This theme explores interviewee's perceptions of how current practices can be improved.

4.5.1. Sub-theme: The need for trauma awareness for all practitioners

A suggestion reverberating throughout most interviews is that TIC is needed for *all* restorative justice stakeholders, including affected communities. With this, we do not minimise crime and its impact, because

understanding trauma, in both offenders and victims, is not being compromising against violence, one can still take really strong stands against crime and violence and recognise that historical trauma or traumatic events contribute to people committing crime and violence (North America 2).

Not everyone is traumatised, but we need to be trauma-aware, able to recognise symptoms of trauma and know how to react and where to refer people when needed. Regarding offenders, Oceania 2 thinks it important to 'create an awareness in inmates about the prevalence of trauma and ways to talk about it' and create pathways for inmates 'who want to work on their issue... without the stigma' attached to mental-healthcare.

This need for trauma awareness is also reflected in the new UN handbook (2020:59), which calls for the new knowledge about trauma and its effects, as well as basics for trauma-informed work, to be integrated into restorative justice practice and training. Thus, according to the handbook,

Facilitators must understand the widespread impact of trauma and be able to recognize the signs and symptoms of trauma in participants in the restorative process, including in themselves... To ensure that they can avoid situations and interventions that may revictimize or retraumatize participants in a restorative justice process (2020:59).

4.5.2. Sub-theme: multidisciplinary collaboration and training

Raising awareness and providing training is another major issue for interviewees. Asia 2 believes TIC should be ‘top on the [restorative justice] training list’. This requires greater awareness, sharing, teaching and learning more about trauma and its effects, and making training accessible to restorative justice practitioners (Oceania 2).

[W]e need to be staying on top of groundbreaking research about trauma and how it affects everyone... there are no excuses for people to be ignorant because there is so much information that is accessible for free... (North America 1).

Since restorative justice is inherently multidisciplinary (Cremin, Sellman & McCluskey, 2012:423), the necessity for interdisciplinary work emerges repeatedly within literature and this research. ‘[Y]ou need to have that interdisciplinary knowledge in order to give you the tools and skills to assess things like trauma and shame’, says South America 1, who sees a need for institutions to collaborate in implementing a holistic form of restorative justice. North America 1 suggests working with psychiatrists, researchers and victim services that specialise in trauma to learn more from them. We trust such collaboration would also help evaluate our work as practitioners and foment safe practices, similar to what a team of restorative justice advocates did in 2004 when meeting with the victim community to discuss principles and standards after observing ‘poor... unresponsive’ and even ‘injurious practices’ (Mika, Achilles, Halbert, Amstutz-Stutzman & Zehr, 2004:37-38). They too suggested implementing collaborative training and approaches to practice standards, and we suggest the same should apply to trauma care in restorative justice.

4.5.3. Sub-theme: Vicarious trauma and self-healing

Vicarious trauma, self-care and self-healing arise as non-neglectable concerns. Awareness of vicarious trauma and opening ways for healing and self-care are important, as ‘up until now... there is almost zero structure support for self-care’ (Asia 2). Oceania 2 agrees we need ‘awareness of the issue of vicarious trauma... there needs to be an understanding of vicarious trauma and how to work with self-care in that context’. This includes becoming aware of our own traumatic experiences and seek healing before helping others, as mentioned previously. Additionally, it also includes an openness to support co-workers who are in danger of vicarious trauma. North America 1 shares her experiences with police forces who repeatedly sought help after traumatic events because

they didn't have support in their own organisation to talk about these things. So, I think even as restorative justice practitioners, working with trauma is useful to encourage people to get the support they need to do their job effectively (North America 1).

Filteau (2017:38) likewise stresses the essentiality of being aware and providing affected professionals with adequate support since their suffering can result in negative consequences for their clients. Fortunately, she notices an increasing awareness of vicarious trauma and its devastating effects.

Interviewees see personal healing as another requisite.

First, they should have been healed before they heal others; they should have been helped before they help others... they should have been practical in what they are intending to ask others to do (Africa 1).

Their staff needs to undergo a trauma-healing process before supporting others. 'Everyone who is working here has been healed inside so that he or she may help, otherwise, we can't work' (Africa 1). Asia 2 also believes we can hardly support others in healing when 'we are keeping our own trauma under the carpet'. He, therefore, proposes that restorative justice training should also focus on exploring personal trauma and healing because 'I have my own challenges and difficulties and I have my own triggers'. That perception is not new. Back in 1951, Jung wrote about the 'wounded physician', which Frank (1995) developed into the concept of the 'wounded healer'. Maruna (2014), drawing on this concept, encourages restorative justice practitioners to become more open and honest about their own woundedness and shame, for he considers this a great resource in supporting offenders. This resonates deeply with Oceania 1's concerns:

I'm not sure our facilitators are equipped. Yeah, I'm not sure. Well, you know, look, don't get me wrong, there are some wonderful facilitators out there but facilitators are often coming from very different places, I think you need to have experienced some of that trauma to understand and empathize with it and understand it. I mean, it's always a bonus to come from the other side of that. It's difficult, I think understanding offending behaviour is difficult for those who have never experienced it, you know, they think you can just click your fingers and it is a matter of choice.

Her experience resonates with LIFERS (2004:64) who believe ‘the transformation process that begins with the self ends with the transformation of others’.

4.5.4. Sub-theme: Training and credentialing

Asia 1’s regret that he ‘didn’t get the good training on trauma’ reflects other interviewees’ opinions. Several are concerned that trauma education is missing in many restorative justice trainings, and they doubt that ‘our facilitators are equipped’ (Oceania 1).

Interviewees fear that many practitioners do not ‘have the skills to address issues of trauma and shame’ (South America 1). Trauma still rarely features in basic restorative justice trainings. It is commonly up to practitioners’ initiative to access specific courses, as trauma-trainings are available but usually not mandatory. South America 1, therefore, suggests that ‘people who are involved in restorative justice should... learn through reading and educational processes about trauma and shame’. Yet, exceptions exist. Both African participants have received trauma training and know of other African programmes where staff are well prepared to offer TIC. Africa 2 explains how in one country they ‘did take trauma seriously and they trained many trauma debriefers’ who supported restorative justice processes. North America 1 and Asia 1 also share how their programmes offer trauma training. Both European participants teach TIC within restorative justice studies, too. Europe 1 nonetheless cautions that due to lack of resources there is ‘less money for training’, and thus many trainings do ‘not deal with these important issues’ - a perception others share.

Training and certification tend to be rather controversial topics in restorative justice literature. While according to the former UN handbook (2006:49), ‘relatively little attention has been given to the issue of accreditation or certification of facilitators and mediators’, the updated UN handbook (2020:59) itself dedicates more attention to training. It also addresses the need for facilitators to know about trauma and its impact. However, when looking at training handbooks from a variety of countries and organisations, there are still different understandings of *what* training should include. Some believe restorative practices are learned best through life experience and reflective processes, whereas others insist on more extensive formal training and accreditation (Bussler, 2004). According to Bussler (2004:344), restorative justice requires formal training *and* personal disposition, combining ‘knowing, doing and being’, as Zehr likewise implies (2002). Oceania 1 agrees: ‘I think you need to have experienced some of that trauma to understand and empathise with it’. Credentialing, also, is required ‘to

sustain our practice, raise the acceptance of Restorative Justice, and protect the public we serve' (Bussler, 2004:344). Wright and Masters (2002:54) likewise affirm the need for training to offer quality restorative justice processes. It would be welcomed if trauma awareness and care would become an essential part of all, even basic, training in restorative justice.

5. Conclusions

This research does not seek to be representative of what is happening internationally concerning trauma-informed restorative justice practice with offenders. Rather, it contributes a first, phenomenological insight into a question that has seemingly not been addressed in this way before. In this sense, the study raises awareness of the subject and will hopefully stimulate further discussion and research on trauma-informed restorative justice practice.

The interviewees tend to observe still little trauma-informed work with offenders in their regions, which rather surprises them since there is increasing information available about the connection between unhealed trauma and offending behaviour. However, they do perceive a growing interest in the topic. Several interviewees fear that the trend to institutionalise restorative justice tends to hinder a holistic implementation. The focus shifts from a needs-based approach to a process and outcome-orientation, such as described by the concept of 'McDonaldisation of justice'. Interviewees also sense a lack of public understanding of restorative justice and ignorance in society about the impact of unhealed trauma on offenders. Additionally, several interviewees observe within their societies rather vengeful, retributive attitudes towards offenders, even more so in countries that have experienced collaborative trauma. Such attitudes impede holistic implementation further, as society feels that offenders are favoured over victims.

Interviewees also fear that many practitioners are not sufficiently trained in working with traumatised people and have not received training in trauma-awareness and care. Based on these research findings, we recommended that trauma and trauma-informed care should form an integral part even of basic practitioner training. Training should also cover topics like vicarious trauma and self-care, as these seem indispensable for providing safe processes. To create safe, trauma-informed processes, an atmosphere of safety and respect in which the participants are considered as holistic individuals is essential. Narrative approaches are deemed particularly effective, and it is recommended

not to underestimate the power of community processes, as the experience of community can potentially support the healing process of those affected by crime. Interdisciplinary work seems essential to serve clients best and to take advantage of the knowledge other related professional fields bring to this topic. In essence, a trauma-informed practice ought to be the norm in restorative justice, with offenders as well as victims and affected communities.

Based on these findings, it might be interesting to further investigate the possible effectiveness of trauma-informed approaches to restorative justice. One area of interest would be the reduction of recidivism among offenders. Another question could be whether a trauma-informed approach involving all stakeholders could increase client satisfaction, especially among victims, as it could make it easier for offenders to empathise with victims, which in turn could have a positive effect on victims. It could be beneficial to examine the issue in more detail, not only concerning offenders but all stakeholders, so that the results could then possibly be fed into restorative justice policies and practice.

Since the interviews were conducted, a growing interest in trauma and ACES (Adverse Childhood Experiences) can be observed in the field of therapeutic jurisprudence. This is a very important and encouraging development and it is hoped that this interest will increasingly spill over into restorative justice practice.

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