

**“An Assessment of One Ohio Organization’s Victim-Offender
Reconciliation Program (VORP) with Respect to Personal Characteristics”**

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Abstract

The United States criminal justice system has employed different approaches in efforts to redress effectively criminal conduct/wrongs. The models emerging as the most dominant include punishment, reform, medical/treatment, and rehabilitation. The current shift is toward a combination of these four models, with rehabilitation serving an integral role. One such combination method is that of Victim-Offender Reconciliation Programs (VORP). The VORP method, rooted in the Restorative Justice approach, involves bringing the offender and the victim together, in the presence of a mediator, in order to have an open dialogue about the offense and each party’s feelings surrounding the act, as well as attempt to develop an agreement, with which both parties are satisfied, about how the offender shall go about reconciling damages caused by their act. This study uses a content analysis of files (N=96) from a local agency employing VORP to assess how influential personal characteristics of the offender are. Overall, results indicate that personal characteristics for the most part are not influential in terms of VORP outcomes although the data used have limited variability making inferences not possible. Future investigation using a diverse dataset is necessary in order to test the hypotheses specified in this study.

Introduction

Deciding upon and implementing the most effective strategy for correcting delinquent and criminal conduct has been a difficult and challenging task facing the Correctional Branch of the Juvenile and Criminal Justice Systems. The American Criminal Justice System has employed numerous different approaches in efforts to effectively redress criminal conduct/wrongs. The models emerging as the most dominant include Punishment, Reform, Medical/Treatment, and Rehabilitation. The shift within corrections has gravitated toward a combination of these four models, with Rehabilitation serving an integral role. Many indicators arise as cause for urgency in and necessity for seeking alternative avenues to improve upon shortcomings and alleviate the unresolved ills of traditional methods. Incarceration and Probation/Community Control serve as two such methods that have been traditionally instituted by corrections' authorities. Although the intent of incarceration falls primarily under the Punishment model, a fairly new rehabilitative aspect involves the idea of reintegration into society, helping offenders to transition back into society as smoothly as possible, following incarceration. The inadequacy of performance on this issue, among others, incites correctional authorities to pursue innovative avenues. Overcrowding prison populations and the harsh reality posed by the prison sub-culture, such as stigmatization and prisonization, also exacerbate the correctional challenge of effectively reintegrating offenders and diminishing their involvement in future criminal conduct by tending to actually work counter to the intended correctional effect. These methods work counter in that they may actually encourage/increase future criminal behavior/acts, due to an offender learning, understanding, and "thriving" within the criminal culture. Such drawbacks of stigmatization and labeling also accompany the traditionally employed correctional mean of probation, which place constraints upon the ability of this correctional method, along with incarceration, to significantly achieve its intentions of successfully correcting offenders and diminishing their inclination to participate in future criminal activity. Since these traditional correctional methods have failed to demonstrate significant effectiveness in addressing these areas, other avenues have been explored.

One such method that corrections' officials have newly instituted into the correctional landscape would be that of Victim-Offender Reconciliation Programs (VORP). The VORP method involves bringing the offender and the victim together, in the presence of a mediator, in order to have an open dialogue about the offense and each party's feelings surrounding the act, as well as attempt to develop an agreement, with which both parties are satisfied, about how the offender shall go about reconciling damages caused by their act. This method is rooted in the Restorative Justice approach to corrections. In Mike Niemeyer and David Shichor's (1996) article, titled "A Preliminary Study of a Large Victim/Offender Reconciliation Program," they represent Umbreit's (1994) statements regarding Restorative Justice, by stating that "restorative justice theory postulates that criminal behavior is first a conflict between individuals. This person who was violated is the primary victim, and the state is the secondary victim" (para. 2). Niemeyer and Shichor (1996) go on to emphasize Bazemore and Umbreit's (1995) statements that "restorative justice relies 'on informal resolution of underlying problems, conflict reduction through dialogue and mediation, and efforts to achieve satisfactory agreements'" (para. 2). VORP can be exercised in the cases involving juveniles, as well as adults. For the purposes of this research, however, the VORP method as it relates to juvenile cases will be examined. In regards to juvenile-related cases, Diversion, which involves limiting the amount of contact an offender initially has with the official Juvenile Justice System, is optimally sought after. This is in an effort to limit labeling, stigmatization, and association with the official system. Although

these are undoubtedly desirable to limit in the cases of both juveniles and adults, it is of greater emphasis in the juvenile system, and the organization's program examined in this study focuses upon juvenile offenders. As emphasized by Niemeyer and Shichor (1996), this process can serve as an alternative to the court process (para. 3). However, in some cases, VORP is employed as a supplemental method that accompanies a traditional mean, such as probation or incarceration. The VORP approach is gaining attention and growing more revered as a desirable corrections' route to travel in the effort to redress criminal wrongs.

The purpose of this research is to describe the characteristics of those subjects who were assigned to and have participated in the Victim-Offender Reconciliation Program (VORP), sponsored and coordinated by an agency located in a rural area of Ohio, and the impact, if any, that these characteristics had upon successful completion of the program, reaching an agreement with the victim(s), fulfilling a reached agreement, and subsequent delinquent behavior, or recidivism. For the purposes of this research, recidivism refers to any subsequent offense/charge for which the offender has been adjudicated guilty. This study intends to examine any subsequent guilty adjudications within the first year, second year, and third year and beyond, following the time the program was completed/terminated by the subject. Subjects will be examined based upon characteristics of sex, age at time of offense, type of offense, number of offenders, number of victims, socio-economic status, first-time/repeat offender status, and restitution amount, in the cases in which a restitution agreement was reached. The successful completion of the program, whether or not an agreement was reached, whether or not a reached agreement was fulfilled, and reoccurrences of documented criminal behavior will be viewed in the context of the characteristic break-down exemplified by the subjects, to see if there are any profound associations that come to light. In drawing out specific characteristics of subjects participating in this VORP offered by an agency located in rural Ohio, one will be able to describe whether or not specific characteristics seem to be associated with completing the program, coming to an agreement, fulfilling the agreement, and increased or decreased recidivism, following participation in the program. The major finding discovered or conclusion drawn as a result of this research endeavor will be added at a later time, after the research has been conducted and analyzed.

Literature Review Integrative Essay

The considerably new initiative of the VORP, also referred to as Victim Offender Mediation (VOM), is often the concrete method used to promote Restorative Justice. Restorative Justice places the needs of the victim of a crime as primary and the state's needs as secondary. With the concept being relatively fresh, the population of studies performed to test the effectiveness of VORP or VOM programs is rather limited. Nonetheless, there have been a centralized cluster of studies that have formed the basis of VORP/VOM research, which has yielded beneficial results that help to guide understanding of victims' and offenders' experiences with these programs, as well as these programs' measured effectiveness in terms of successful restitution agreement fulfillment and reduction in subsequent criminal activity. Although many of the reviewed studies tended to focus upon any one of these single elements or a combination of such, findings and conclusions from these studies varied to a certain level.

In studying the impact that VORP/VOM appears to have upon negotiating restitution contracts and fulfilling these contracts, there does seem to be some inconsistency in the research findings. Niemeyer and Shichor's (1996) study of a VORP in Orange County, California found that joint meetings between victims and offenders yielded 99 percent of those cases ending in a

reached agreement. Of those reaching an agreement in their study, Niemeyer and Shichor (1996) reported that 96.8 percent of those contracts were honored by the offender, while only 3 percent were not fulfilled. No comparison group was provided by Niemeyer and Shichor (1996) with respect to reached and fulfilled restitution agreements. Therefore, one cannot speak to VORP effectiveness in light of more traditional methods. Umbreit and Coates' (1993) study of four different VOM program sites did incorporate a comparison group, however, and found that those offenders who had reached a restitution agreement throughout the course of VOM were much more apt to fulfill their agreements than those offenders who were ordered by the court to pay a specific restitution amount to their victims, which they found to be a statistically significant difference. This finding is contradicted by Roy's (1993) finding that no statistically significant difference was found that suggested that offenders reaching a restitution contract through VOM were more likely to honor and fulfill their restitution contract than those offenders experiencing a court-applied restitution program. By his own admission, Roy's (1993) result may have been statistically insignificant due to the small sample set of subjects which comprised his two groups under study. Umbreit and Coates (1993) incorporated a matching scheme based upon several different variables, such as race, sex, age, restitution amount, etc., in order to provide for equalized mediation and comparison groups, as well as two different sets of mediation and comparison groups upon which to perform the restitution contract completion component of their study. Umbreit and Coates (1993) implemented additional sound methodological measures to ensure group equivalency and accuracy of results. Although Abrams, Umbreit, and Coates (2006) performed a qualitatively-based research approach that did not look specifically at completion of restitution contracts, they did find that participants deemed the terms of the restitution contracts as "fair," even in the cases where the restitution punishments were more severe than they previously expected. Although this may be important to note, it also cannot be ignored that this particular research study was limited in its sample size, having included just seven offenders and four sets of parents, with an offender in the subject pool being one of their children.

With respect to the impact that VOM seems to have upon recidivism, which would be documented subsequent delinquent/criminal behavior, or guilty adjudications, following participation in the program, the research seems to vary a bit on this point as well, with some concluding that VOM successfully reduces the likelihood of future involvement in criminal activity and others concluding that no statistically significant difference can be found. The definition of recidivism was highly variable among the several studies, which could easily have had an impact on whether or not improved recidivism rates were detected. Nugent, Williams, and Umbreit (2004) and Bradshaw, Roseborough, and Umbreit (2006), who each conducted meta-analyses on a significant number of existing research studies assessing the influence of VOM on recidivism, each found that participation in VOM programs correlated with significantly lower levels of reoffending. Nugent, Williams, and Umbreit (2004) found that participation in such programs could reduce the likelihood of reoffending by up to 30%, in comparison with non-participants. Although Nugent, Williams, and Umbreit (2004) did acknowledge that those studies included within their analysis that implemented the soundest measures to ensure representative groups reported lower impact on participant recidivism, they were able to conclude that those studies still demonstrated an existing relationship between VOM participation and reduced recidivism. Furthermore, Morris and Maxwell's (1998) study, examining a New Zealand family group conferencing approach to juvenile offending, an approach resembling that of victim-offender mediation, found that rates of reoffending were no

higher than those of comparable court-processed groups, and continued on by stating that reoffending rates of those assigned to family group counseling could potentially even be reduced in comparison to court-assigned offenders. Morris and Maxwell (1998) go on to suggest that aspects characterizing restorative justice programs could potentially generate lower likelihoods of recidivation.

This finding of participation in VOM being associated with lower levels of recidivism is contradicted by Niemeyer and Shichor (1996) in that they found that subjects in their VORP sample and subjects in their comparison sample, comprised of all those individuals recommended to VORP in that county but refusing participation, demonstrated no statistically significant difference in terms of reoffending. Actually, Niemeyer and Shichor (1996) reported that the VORP sample demonstrated a slightly higher incidence of reoffending when compared to the non-participant group. However, Niemeyer and Shichor (1996) do concede that this finding could be attributed to the fact that their comparison group was a “less stable” population in that they were highly mobile, moving in and out of the area frequently, which would make it possible for their delinquent activity to go undiscovered and lead to perceived lower re-offense rates. Niemeyer and Shichor (1996) do agree with the former findings on some fronts, however, in that VORP participation may slow down the reoccurrence of criminal/delinquent activity because they found that a significant number of VORP participants did not reoffend as quickly after their participation in the program as non-participating offenders.

Roy’s (1993) finding aligns with Niemeyer and Shichor’s (1996) first finding that no statistically significant difference exists with respect to recidivism between VORP/VOM participants and non-participants, because he concluded that no statistically significant difference could be articulated between a VORP sample of participants and a court-ordered restitution program sample of participants. Again, Roy (1993) did concede that the small sample sizes he incorporated may have accounted for his conclusion of statistical insignificance. The definition of reoffense used may have also played a role in concluding statistically insignificant differences between VOM participating and nonparticipating groups. Therefore, the broader definitions used by Niemeyer and Shichor (1996), any official contact with an Orange County Law Enforcement Agency for one, two, and three years respectfully, and Roy (1993), any documents denoting “rearrest” throughout the two-year tracking period following completion of the program, may have resulted in net-widening and diminished detection of significance. In the cases of narrow definitions, such as receiving a guilty adjudication for an offense, being used, which was the case in some of the studies included within the meta-analyses by Nugent et. al. (2004) and Bradshaw et. al. (2006), it may have been possible for statistical significance to have been reached. Umbreit and Coates (1993) did conclude from their study that those juvenile offenders participating in VOM committed far fewer acts of delinquency following participation in the program than did those not participating in such a program, however, the finding was not statistically significant. Thus, on the statistically significant front, they express agreement with Niemeyer and Shichor (1996) and Roy (1993) in that no such significance was settled upon. Furthermore, Davis (2009), in his comparison study of a group referred to mediation and a group referred to the court system to determine whether or not mediation demonstrates a greater level of effectiveness when encountering criminally-related conflicts of the interpersonal nature, aligned with Niemeyer and Shichor (1996) and Roy (1993) in that he concluded that minimal evidence surfaced to suggest that the procedure of mediation limits recidivism to a greater extent than the traditional court procedure.

Although Davis’s (2009) findings are not in the realm of statistical significance with

respect to mediation spurring recidivism reduction, he does conclude that those comprising the mediation group reoffended less frequently during the post-mediation tracking period of four months. Additionally, in Umbreit and Coates' (1993) study, they do go on to state that involvement in mediation does seem to lessen the occurrence of subsequent engagement in delinquent behavior. In furthering support for VOM benefits in regards to reducing recidivism, Abrams, Umbreit, and Gordon (2006) emphasized that VOM provides opportunities, such as "developing empathy, seeing the victim in a new way, and being seen in a different way," which allow for the potential to "change," redirect their lives, and avoid future criminal conduct (p. 253). Although some mixed and varied results have surfaced in regards to the ability of mediation to reduce offenders' likelihoods of reoffending, there needs to be more research conducted, in order to gather more evidence to be able to confidently speak to its apparent effectiveness or ineffectiveness of reducing recidivism.

In terms of victims and offenders' experiences with mediation, there do seem to be high levels of reported fairness, although some variation does exist in this regard. Niemeyer and Shichor (1996) concluded that victims' interactions within the VORP seemed to suggest that certain needs were more appropriately or satisfactorily met through direct encounters with those who offended them. Furthermore, their study seemed to suggest that firmer understanding was reached between the two parties after having gone through mediation (Niemeyer and Shichor, 1996). However, Umbreit and Coates (1993) found no significant differences in offender satisfaction levels with how their cases were handled between mediation participants and two non-participating groups. However, a statistically significant difference in victims' satisfaction levels with how their cases were handled did exist between mediation participants and two non-participating groups, with participants demonstrating higher levels of satisfaction with how their cases were handled (Umbreit and Coates, 1993). Furthermore, Umbreit and Coates (1993) found that 9 out of every 10 victims and offenders within the VOM participating group reported satisfaction with the outcome of mediation, which was generally in the form of a restitution contract. Lastly, victims and offenders participating in mediation tended to judge the process as more fair than did those who participated in other methods of correction. Abrams, Umbreit, and Gordon's (2006) findings further express offenders' experiences with mediation. Abrams et. al (2006) found that participants deemed the reached restitution agreement as fair, even when it exceeded the punishment that they were expecting to receive. Additionally, participants expressed satisfaction with the process, which was generally tied to the opportunity to gain "closure and clarification;" to be seen in a more "human" light; and to gain a greater understanding of the impact that their actions projected onto their victims (pp. 250-251). Davis' (2009) Brooklyn-based study concluded that the "complainants" in the mediation group were significantly more likely to view their experience as positive than were those "complainants" exposed to the traditional court approach. Davis (2009) does go on to emphasize that mediation is conducive to certain situations, while not quite as well suited for others, taking into consideration the nature of the criminal offense and the pre-existing relationships between the victim(s) and offender(s). Parents involved in Abrams et. al. (2006) study expressed that they saw the program as a beneficial initiative. In regards to the experiences of victims and offenders with mediation and their perspectives on the process, the data is largely supportive of positive reports of fairness, satisfaction, and benefits.

Umbreit and Bradshaw (1997) conclude a similar finding with regard to victim satisfaction with the mediation initiative, with it being one of considerably high satisfaction with the process. Umbreit and Bradshaw (1997) endeavored to examine variations in the satisfaction

levels of victims depending upon the juvenile or adult status of their offender. They were able to accomplish this feat by comparing a group of victims experiencing mediation with a juvenile offender and a group of victims encountering mediation with an adult offender (Umbreit and Bradshaw, 1997). Umbreit and Bradshaw (1997) concluded that both victim groups exhibited a relatively high amount of satisfaction in regards to their experience of the justice system in general and VOM specifically. It is iterated, however, that the victim group offended by juveniles relayed greater amounts of satisfaction with their experience in the criminal justice process as a whole than was the victim group offended by adults (Umbreit and Bradshaw 1997). With regards to the mediation process specifically, however, the conclusion was reached that both victim groups were satisfied to appreciable degrees (Umbreit and Bradshaw 1997). In the continuation of the examination of victim experience in the context of victim-offender mediation, Wemmers and Cyr (2005) focus upon a Quebec City's VOM program to gain insight into the role that VOM may play in generating healing for the victim. A substantial amount of victims participating in the particular program under study conveyed that their involvement in the program assisted them in their endeavor to move past their victimization, feel a sense of progress in regards to their victimization, and feel as though they had benefited as a result of involvement within the mediation (Wemmers and Cyr, 2005). Overall, Wemmers and Cyr (2005) concluded that an overwhelming percentage, namely 90%, of participating victims viewed victim-offender mediation as a positive endeavor. In light of these conclusions of victims' fulfilling experiences with the restorative justice-based VOM method, it leads one to identify this technique as one worthy of continued attention, implementation, and consideration as a preferable approach and correctional method.

In looking at the levels of participants' satisfaction in an approach constructed similarly to that of mediation, which would be the family group conferencing model, researchers Morris and Maxwell (1998) examined a New Zealand implemented model. The approach of the family group conferencing incorporates similar components as would mediation, such as a conference involving the victim, the offender, the offender's family, and a mediator, which seeks to allow everyone the opportunity to voice their experience with regard to the offender's actions and their recommendations for the actions to be taken to restore the harm created as a result (Morris and Maxwell, 1998). With respect to the experience of the families with this initiative, Morris and Maxwell (1998) determined that the families viewed conferencing as significantly more favorable than exposure to court proceedings. Additionally, a significant percentage of youthful offenders and their parents reported high levels of satisfaction with the results stemming from family group counseling (Morris and Maxwell, 1998). Although Morris and Maxwell (1998) indicate that the participating victims are likely more pleased with the results of conferencing as opposed to court proceedings, they do admit that the level of satisfaction tended to be rated lower by victims in comparison with group-leading mediators and involved families. However, Morris and Maxwell (1998) go on to state that a considerable amount of victims harbored feelings of the positive nature toward the conferencing experience and the results of such.

With respect to restitution agreement completion, impact on recidivism, and victims' and offenders' experiences with the program, a great deal of research has been conducted, although with mixed results. It is important to continue on the research path to establish a more sound and consistent body of research and evidence for VORP/VOM that speaks to the effectiveness of these initiatives in terms of the aforementioned components. Although these certainly help to guide the following research intentions, none of the encountered research projects looked specifically at what the following study attempts to examine. The following research project

attempts to look at a specific VORP's subjects and examine how variables such as sex, age, socio-economic status, type of offense, number of offenders, number of victims, first offense/previous offenses, and restitution amount have upon the following components: completion of the program; the reaching of a restitution contract; the completion of the contract, in cases where one was reached; and subsequent reoffending. Although this may have never been specifically approached by any previous researchers that were encountered in this review of the literature, it may be desirable to look at these variables in light of one another and see how differing characteristics may associate with specific outcomes of the program, in order to determine if any relationships can be detected between offender characteristics and outcomes of program participation.

Theoretical Framework

The initiative of Victim-Offender Reconciliation Program(s)/Victim Offender Mediation (VORP/VOM) is a concrete expression of the Restorative Justice Theory (RJT), as emphasized by all the researchers who conducted previous research and evaluations on VORP/VOM (Abrams et. al., 2006, p. 244; Bradshaw et. al., 2006, p. 88; Niemeyer & Shichor, 1996, n.p.; Nugent et. al., 2004, p. 408; Roy, 1993, n.p.; Umbreit & Coates, 1993, 566). As laid out by the researchers, and their studies, referred to throughout the context of this research preparation, Restorative Justice positions the victim of the particular crime as the primary victim, or harm receiver, as a result of the offense, while placing the state as the secondary victim, or harm receiver, as a result of the offense (Abrams et. al., 2006, p. 244; Bradshaw et. al., 2006, p. 88; Niemeyer & Shichor, 1996, n.p.; Nugent et. al., 2004, p. 408; Roy, 1993, n.p.; Umbreit & Coates, 1993, p. 566). Several of the traditional correctional models failed to recognize the importance of the victims' needs and, thus, performed poorly at properly satisfying these needs – failing to help them begin to heal following the committal of the act against them. The intention of Restorative Justice, which is often times engrained in and represented by VORP/VOM, is to satisfy these all-too-often-times forgotten needs and hurts of the victim of the crime. Thus, it is important to empirically test VORP/VOM programs, to conclude whether or not these goals are being met, as well as if they are having any noticeable impact on other aims of correctional methods, especially in terms of offender performance. Although the program, VORP/VOM, that is under study in this particular research study is rooted in Restorative Justice, the particular direction of the research project and its variables are not specifically grounded in Restorative Justice Theory nor can the specific theory strictly explain the relationships between the certain variables incorporated into this research study. However, it is still helpful to gain a further understanding of the theory upon which this particular initiative is founded.

The variables to be examined are those of: sex; age at the time of the offense; the type of the offense, such as whether it was a property crime or a crime against the person(s); the number of offenders contributing to the committal of the crime; the number of victims who were harmed by the committed crime(s); the status of the offender(s) as being either first-time offender(s) or repeat offender(s); and the settled upon restitution amount, in those cases where an agreement was reached throughout the course of the mediation session(s). These variables will be examined to see if they have any influence over, and thus strike any patterns or relationships between, the following variables: completion of the program; whether or not an agreement was reached; whether or not the agreement was fulfilled, in those cases in which an agreement was come to; and subsequent reoffenses by offender(s).

It is thought that gender differences may guide how offenders experience VORP and, thus, cause participants to perform differently throughout the program based upon their male/female status, specifically in terms of whether or not they complete the program, whether or not an agreement is reached, whether or not a reached agreement is fulfilled, and if and how much they engage in reoffending following the program. It is thought that those identifying with the female gender may be more receptive to and impacted by the interpersonal, and perhaps emotional, approach of the VORP and, thus, perform more effectively with respect to the goals of the program.

It is expected that the participant's age at the time of the committal of the offense may also have a noticeable impact on these program components of completion, restitution agreements, completion of such agreements, and subsequent reoffenses. Although it could be that younger aged juveniles (such as ages 13 and under) may demonstrate more effectiveness at achieving these program components, it is anticipated that older juvenile offenders (aged 14-17) will perform more effectively on these program components. This anticipation stems from the perspective that older juveniles may be more apt to understand the full gravity of impact that their actions had upon their victims and be more emotionally moved by the confrontational encounter. This emotional confrontational encounter may be more likely to move older juvenile offenders to the extent of seeing the errors in their ways and, thus, inciting effective change in future chosen behavior patterns. The younger juvenile offenders may have a more difficult time emotionally connecting and understanding the extent of impact their actions had upon someone, thus diminishing the effect of the program. However, the opposite may be found to be true, thus emphasizing the significance of examining this potential difference in impact.

When it comes to the type of offense committed, whether it be a property offense or a violent offense against a person(s), it is anticipated that a difference will surface in how these offenders will encounter and, therefore, perform on the basis of these VORP components. It is thought that those offenders who committed a property crime will perform more effectively based upon these components. This line of thought is employed due to the nature of the crime itself being less violent, indicating that the malicious intent was diminished as well, which leads one to believe that the lapse in judgment was less severe and the offenders may be more apt to benefit from listening to victims relay how deep the impact was that the offenders actions had. This would lead to a greater understanding of the impact that their actions had and may be more likely to promote change and empathy. In the cases of the violent offenders, however, the intent of maliciousness or intent to harm was likely present or the lapse in judgment was far more severe. This could lead to it being more difficult to promote change or generate effectiveness, due to the violent nature of the committed crime and the intent to harm perhaps motivating it. However, this trend may be disproved by the study, which points to the necessity of examining it.

When it comes to the number of offenders involved, it is projected that the more offenders that were involved, the greater the likelihood for the sessions to generate a noticeable impact with respect to the outlined program aims of completion, reached restitution agreements, fulfilled restitution agreements, and reduced reoffending. This line of thought stems from the notion that peer influence is heavily present in juvenile activity. Therefore, some involved offenders in a crime may have been unduly influenced by powerful peers. This could lead to those who were pressured by the "ring leaders" to being more heavily impacted by the mediation sessions and motivated to complete the program, honor the contract reached, and avoid reoffending. Oppositely, an individually committed crime or a crime committed by a small

cluster of juveniles may diminish, at least to a certain extent in some cases, the impact of peer pressure, which would specifically be true of individually committed offenses.

The number of victims harmed may also play a role in whether or not participation in mediation sessions imposes an impact. As the number of victims increases, the likelihood of achieving these aforementioned aims of the program may be diminished because the offender has gone to more extensive lengths to impact several victims and commit acts that have harmed a larger population of individuals. Contrastingly, an offender impacting a single or small cluster of individuals may have had a lessened understanding of one's actions or operated under enough judgment to withhold harm toward a plethora of individuals. Impacting more victims may show more of a callousness, lesser likelihood of being open to mediation, and an intent to continue engaging in delinquent/criminal conduct, whereas fewer victims may demonstrate less of a callousness, more of an agreeability to attempting mediation, and more of a potential to be reformed/rehabilitated.

When it comes to one's status as a first-time or repeat offender, it is projected that an offender who encounters mediation as a result of their first offense will be much more likely to take the program seriously and attempt to comply with the program and its aims. Therefore, it is thought that first-time offenders will perform more effectively than repeat offenders in terms of completing the program, reaching a restitution contract, fulfilling that contract, and reducing subsequent reoffending. This is thought because first-time offenders have not been exposed to the stigma, labeling, or justice/correctional system for as significant of an amount of time as repeat offenders, thus posing a greater likelihood of behavior alteration and correction.

With respect to restitution amount, in those cases where a restitution agreement was reached, it is believed that this variable will project an impact onto whether or not the agreement is fulfilled. It is thought that as the restitution amount increases, the fulfillment likelihood or rate will decrease, thus posing an inverse relationship. However, socio-economic status of offenders will undoubtedly play a role as to whether or not the restitution amount is paid to the victim. Therefore, socio-economic status will have to be controlled for, or at least taken into account, when examining the relationship or trend that arises between the initial two variables.

When examining these various variables and how they specifically correlate with or relate to one another, caution and care will have to be taken to see if there truly is a relationship between specific variables or if a spurious relationship is being created due to an outside variable not accounted for. This will pose quite a challenge, but it is one that is desirable and necessary to face.

Methodology

The method of data collection in this study is content analysis of official records from offenders who participated in the Victim-Offender Reconciliation Program (VORP) of a rural Ohio agency as well as of two referring counties' juvenile court/probation records, in regards to subsequent reoffense/recidivism information. One challenge in examining court records in regards to recidivism is that only the offenses which were committed in either of these counties are detected, while offenses that may have been committed in other jurisdictions go beyond the scope of these counties' data. Therefore, more offenses may have been committed in other jurisdictions.

Sampling Strategy

The population under study for this research project was that of VORP/VOM

program participants at a Ohio rural area counseling agency. This study examined all of the offenders who participated in the agency's VORP starting in January of 2006 and going through December of 2008, who actually mediated face-to-face or had correspondence with their victims through a mediator who represented each parties' interests to the other side (N=96). By setting the cut-off point at 2008, for cases having had a mediation by that time allowed for participants to be tracked for the two-year follow-up period, post-participation in VORP, in order to identify subsequent reoffenses.

Variables and Hypotheses

Independent Variables

The variables to be examined are: the sex of the offender; the age of the offender at the time of the offense; the type of offense committed; the number of offenders; the number of victims; the offender's status as a first-time or repeat offender; and the settled upon restitution amount, in those cases where such an agreement was reached. All of these categories are exclusive, exemplify no mathematical properties, and are non-rank order data. Therefore, since these categories do not overlap, cycles of numbers will be reused and repeated to denote different levels of variables in different variable categories.

- 1) The sex of the offender will be coded numerically, with those male offenders being coded as (1) and females as (2).
- 2) The age of the offender will be coded numerically as well, with those offenders deemed as "older juvenile offenders" being coded as a one (1) and those being deemed as "younger juvenile offenders" being coded as a two (2). For the purposes of this research study, "older juvenile offenders" will be deemed those offenders in the age range of 14-17; while "younger juvenile offenders" will be deemed those offenders in the age range of 13 and under.
- 3) The category of the type of offense committed will be broken down into two levels, property offenses and violent offenses against a/the person(s). Property offenses will be categorized by a one (1) and violent offenses against a/the person(s) will be classified as a two (2).
- 4) The category of the number of offenders involved in committing a specific act which led them to assignment to mediation participation will be broken down into four categories, with those being "one offender," "two offenders," "three offenders," and "four or more offenders." In alignment with the classifications, they will be numerically coded as follows: a one (1) for "one offender;" a two (2) for "two offenders;" a three (3) for "three offenders;" and a four (4) for "four or more offenders."
- 5) The category involving the number of victims of the offense will involve six categories, with those categories being "1-2 victims," "3-4 victims," "5-6 victims," "7-8 victims," "9-10 victims," and "11 or more victims." The coding scheme for these categories will be as follows: a one (1) for "1-2 victims;" a two (2) for "3-4 victims;" a three (3) for "5-6 victims;" a four (4) for "7-8 victims;" a five (5) for "9-10 victims;" and a six (6) for "11 or more victims."
- 6) The variable of first-time/repeat offender status for the offender will have two levels. The "first-time offender" category will be coded as a one (1) and the "repeat offender" category will be coded as a two (2).
- 7) The restitution amount settled upon, in those cases where a restitution agreement was

reached, will have four levels. Those levels will be “\$0-\$100,” “\$100.01-\$200,” “\$200.01-\$300,” and “\$300.01 or greater.” The following codes will be assigned to each level: a one (1) to “\$0-\$100;” a two (2) to “\$100.01-\$200;” a three (3) to “\$200.01-\$300;” and a four (4) to “\$300.01 or greater.”

Dependent Variables

The dependent variables to be examined throughout this research study will be those of completion of the VORP; whether or not a restitution agreement was come to as a result of mediation; whether or not reached restitution agreements were fulfilled; and subsequent reoffending following participation in VORP. As with the independent variables, the categories are nominal level data, which indicate they do not display mathematical properties nor do they demonstrate rank-order data. Therefore, the codes that they are given will repeat from one variable to the next, since they do not overlap or coincide with one another.

1. Completion of the VORP will be coded as either “yes, the program was completed by the offender” or “no, the program was not completed by the offender.” The “yes” situations will be categorized as ones (1) and the “no” situations will be categorized as twos (2).
2. The reaching of a restitution agreement, or restitution terms, variable will have two levels, as well. The levels of “yes, a restitution agreement was reached” and “no, a restitution agreement was not reached” will be employed, with the “yes” situations being coded as ones (1) and the “no” situations being coded as twos (2).
3. The variable that involves whether or not an agreement was successfully completed or fulfilled, in those cases in which an agreement was reached, will have two levels as well. Those two levels will involve that of “yes, the agreement was successfully fulfilled” or “no, the agreement was unsuccessfully fulfilled.” These two levels will be coded as follows: a one (1) given to those defined as “yes” and a two (2) given to those defined as “no.”
4. With respect to recidivism, this concept will be defined as any acts or offenses for which the offender was adjudicated, or found, guilty in the two counties referring offenders to the Ohio agency, following participation in VORP. Offenders will be tracked for a period of two years following their participation in VORP. The number of guilty adjudications will be recorded for the first and second years separately.

Level and Source of Validity

The level of validity being employed for these measures would be that of face validity, the lowest level of validity, in that the measures have been reviewed and examined for their perceived sensibility and logical nature for accurately measuring the intended concepts.

Hypotheses

The main hypothesis to be tested in this research project will be: the personal characteristics of offenders will influence the effectiveness of the Victim-Offender Reconciliation Program (VORP).

The following sub-hypotheses will assist in testing the overall hypothesis, by measuring the interaction between specific levels of the independent and dependent variables.

1. Assigned female offenders will complete the VORP at a significantly higher rate than will the assigned male offenders.
2. Assigned female offenders will negotiate a restitution agreement with their victims through mediation at a significantly higher rate than will male offenders.

3. Assigned female offenders will honor their restitution agreements at a significantly higher rate than will assigned male offenders.
4. Assigned female offenders will show significantly lower rates of recidivism than will male VORP participants.
5. Older-aged juvenile offenders will show significantly higher levels of completion of the program than will their younger-aged juvenile counterparts.
6. Older-aged juvenile offenders will show significantly higher levels of reaching a restitution agreement with their victims than will their younger-aged counterparts.
7. Older-aged juvenile offenders will show significantly higher levels of completion of their restitution contracts than will their younger-aged counterparts.
8. Older-aged juvenile offenders will show significantly lower levels of recidivism than will their younger-aged juvenile counterparts.
9. Property offenders will show significantly higher levels of program completion than will violent offenders.
10. Property offenders will show significantly higher levels of reaching a restitution agreement with their victims than will violent offenders.
11. Property offenders will show significantly higher levels of completing a reached agreement with their victims than will violent offenders.
12. Property offenders will show significantly lower levels of recidivism than will violent offenders.
13. The greater the number of offenders involved with a single crime, the greater the likelihood of completion of the VORP.
14. The greater the number of offenders involved with a single crime, the greater the likelihood of reaching a restitution agreement with their victims.
15. The greater the number of offenders involved with a single crime, the greater the likelihood of completing the reached agreement with their victims.
16. The greater the number of offenders involved with a single crime, the lower the involved offenders' levels of recidivism.
17. The fewer the number of victims harmed by the offender(s)' actions, the greater the likelihood of completing VORP.
18. The fewer the number of victims harmed, the greater the likelihood of reaching a restitution agreement.
19. The fewer the number of victims involved, the greater the likelihood of the offender(s) fulfilling the restitution contract.
20. The fewer victims harmed, the lesser the likelihood of the offender(s) recidivating.
21. First-time offenders will be more likely to complete the VORP than will those offenders who have offended before.
22. First-time offenders will be more likely to negotiate a restitution contract with their victims through mediation than will those offenders who have offended before.
23. First-time offenders will be more likely to fulfill negotiated contracts with their victims than will those who are repeat-offenders.
24. First-time offenders will be less likely to recidivate following participation in mediation than will those offenders who committed offense(s) prior to the offense for which they were assigned to mediation.
25. And finally, the higher the agreed upon restitution amount, the lower the completion rate of the restitution contract.

Analysis

When testing the numerous hypotheses that are posed throughout the course of this study, specific statistical techniques were used via the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) version 15.0 to achieve this end. It was determined that the Chi Square (X^2) would be incorporated throughout this research project to determine whether or not two variables were independent of one another or had influence over one another. Each hypothesis was tested using the 0.05 level of significance. This will be further described below.

Findings

Below are included frequency tables indicating the sample composition for offenders participating in the specific Victim-Offender Reconciliation Program (VORP) between January 2006 and December 2008. Only those cases which actually mediated, those which met for a mediation, or those situations where the victim(s) and offender(s) had contact with one another through a mediator, those cases where a face-to-face meeting did not occur but contact was made through a mediator speaking with each side and conveying the interests of each side to the other in hopes of reaching an agreement. There were cases where data or information regarding certain offenders was not locatable. The variables where the greatest amount of data was not located were previous offenses and subsequent reoffenses (recidivism).

Frequency Distributions

Subject Sex

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid Male	82	85.4	85.4	85.4
Female	14	14.6	14.6	100.0
Total	96	100.0	100.0	

The sample was largely male, with 82 males to 14 females included within the study.

Age

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid <= 13	20	20.8	21.3	21.3
14-16	51	53.1	54.3	75.5
17-18	23	24.0	24.5	100.0
Total	94	97.9	100.0	
Missing System	2	2.1		
Total	96	100.0		

Within the offender sample, 20 offenders were 13 years old or younger, 51 were between the ages of 14 and 16, and 23 were 17 or 18 years old. The greatest bulk of the sample were those offenders ranging in age from 14 to 16 years old.

Offense Type

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid Property	90	93.8	93.8	93.8
Violent	5	5.2	5.2	99.0
Other	1	1.0	1.0	100.0
Total	96	100.0	100.0	

The offenders who were referred to the VORP had mainly committed property offenses. There were 90 cases where the delinquent act committed was a property offense, which involved such things as breaking and entering, vandalism, theft, or criminal damaging. There were only five (5) cases where a violent offense was committed, which involved assault. There was one instance where the offense was classified as neither, which was thus coded as “other.”

Number of Offenders Involved

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid 1	31	32.3	32.3	32.3
> 1	65	67.7	67.7	100.0
Total	96	100.0	100.0	

For the variable of involved offenders within a given delinquent action/offense, those receiving a code of 1.00 were those cases where there was only one offender involved. Those cases receiving a 2.00 were those cases where there were two (2) or more offenders involved. About one-third (31) of the cases involved a single offender, whereas about two-thirds (65) of the cases involved multiple offenders.

Number of Participating Victims in the Mediation

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid 1 victim	58	60.4	60.4	60.4
2-4 victims	21	21.9	21.9	82.3
5 or more	17	17.7	17.7	100.0
Total	96	100.0	100.0	

Fifty-eight cases involved a single victim participating in the mediation, 21 cases involved between two (2) and four (4) victims participating in the mediation. Seventeen cases or about 22% involved five (5) or more victims participating in the mediation meetings.

Number of Previous Offenses

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	None	59	61.5	77.6	77.6
	1	17	17.7	22.4	100.0
	Total	76	79.2	100.0	
Missing	System	20	20.8		
Total		96	100.0		

Within the category of previous offenses, information for this variable was able to be gathered and identified for just under 80% of the offenders (76 of the 96 cases). Fifty-nine of the offenders had no record of previous offenses, meaning that they had not been adjudicated guilty of a delinquent offense prior to the date of the offense for which he or she was referred to mediation. Seventeen offenders had committed previous offenses.

Contract Negotiated/Contract Made

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Yes	87	90.6	91.6	91.6
	No	8	8.3	8.4	100.0
	Total	95	99.0	100.0	
Missing	System	1	1.0		
Total		96	100.0		

Of the 96 situations, 87 had resulted in a reached, or negotiated, agreement. 8 mediation situations had resulted in no agreement. There was one case where this information was not located. With regard to the cases in which no agreement was reached, this may have been due to the fact that the victim and offender mutually came to the conclusion and agreed that the mediation itself was sufficient and no further contract/agreement was necessary.

Completion of Negotiated Contract

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Yes, Successful	72	75.0	88.9	88.9
	No, Not Successful	9	9.4	11.1	100.0
	Total	81	84.4	100.0	
Missing	System	15	15.6		
Total		96	100.0		

Of the 87 agreements that were reached, 72 of the reached agreements were successfully completed. 9 of those reached agreements were not successfully completed. Reasons that contracts may not have been fulfilled include that the offender relocated and moved out of the area or that the offender completed parts of the agreement, while failing to complete others. Of the 87 reached contracts, there were 6 cases in which information was not able to be located regarding contract completion.

Type of Contract Negotiated

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Cash	34	35.4	39.1	39.1
	Non-Cash	35	36.5	40.2	79.3
	Combo	18	18.8	20.7	100.0
	Total	87	90.6	100.0	
Missing	System	9	9.4		
Total		96	100.0		

Although this variable regarding the type of contract negotiated was not originally considered, and therefore included within the research design phase of the research, once the research project got under way, this variable was added to the set of dependent variables. Of the 87 contracts that were negotiated as a result of mediation, 34 were strictly cash-based, 35 were non-cash-based, and 18 involved a combination of cash and non-cash components. Non-cash components would include such things as community service, working for the victim, and/or providing written or verbal apologies to the harmed victims.

Subsequent Reoffense(s) within Following 2 Years (Recidivism)

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	None	32	33.3	47.1	47.1
	Yes	36	37.5	52.9	100.0
	Total	68	70.8	100.0	
Missing	System	28	29.2		
Total		96	100.0		

With regard to reoffenses, information was able to be gathered only on approximately two-thirds of the sample. A .00 coding indicates that the offender did not have any subsequent offenses for which he or she was adjudicated guilty within the two-year follow-up period, beginning at the date of the mediation. A “yes” coding indicates that the offender had documented subsequent offenses post-mediation. This variable renders an even split between non-reoffenders and reoffenders, with 32 having reoffended and 36 having not reoffended. However, it must be noted that this information may not be fully reflective of actual recidivism rates, since the re-offense information was gathered only from two counties and was only gathered from the Juvenile Probation Department. Therefore, reoffenses committed outside of the jurisdiction of the two referring counties, along with offenses committed after an offender has turned 18, which would then be handled by the adult system, during the two-year follow-up period, would not be reflected in the recidivism rates provided by this study. Furthermore, some offenders included within the sample were already 18 at the time of the offense for which they were referred to mediation. Therefore, any subsequent reoffenses would be handled by the adult system. Furthermore, a personal error on the part of the researcher in creating the informational sheet requesting information about specific offenders from the two county Juvenile Probation Departments resulted in a misalignment between offenders and their corresponding data. This occurred for approximately ten (10) cases. Therefore, due to this misalignment, recidivism

information for approximately ten (10) offenders was not able to be accurately incorporated within this study.

Restitution Amount

		Freq	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	\$0 - \$250	33	34.4	66.0	66.0
	\$250 - \$500	7	7.3	14.0	80.0
	\$500-\$750	4	4.2	8.0	88.0
	\$750+	6	6.3	12.0	100.0
	Total	50	52.1	100.0	
Missing	System	46	47.9		
Total		96	100.0		

Of the 52 mediated cases that resulted in a contract involving a cash component, monetary amounts were able to be located for 50 of the 52 cases. Thirty-three cases involved a restitution amount of \$250 or less, which constituted a majority of the cases. Seven (7) cases involved restitution amounts between \$250.01 and \$500. Four (4) cases involved restitution amounts between \$500.01 and \$750. Lastly, six (6) cases involved restitution amounts of over \$750.

Statistical Tests

The test chosen to test the overall, grouped hypothesis of this research study and the relationship(s) between the independent and dependent variables was the statistical test of Chi Square (X^2). The Chi Square (X^2) is a test of independence to determine whether or not two variables are independent of one another or if they influence one another. Due to the categorical nature of the variables, it limited the statistical tests that were able to be run on the variables to determine significant influence or independent between the several variables. The 0.05 level of significance was used to test the overall, grouped hypothesis and the potential influence between the independent and dependent variables.

**The occurrence of extremely limited variability amongst the sample made it difficult for significance to be established and for variables to be determined as influential over one another. The limited variability within the sample also inhibited the strength of the test and, in some cases, did not allow for the sufficient criteria to be met in order for the Chi Square (X^2) statistical test to be run properly. For instance, the limited variability frequently did not allow for the minimum number of cases, which is generally set at five (5), to be present within each cell. Therefore, the minimum requirements needed for the test to be run accurately were not consistently present. Furthermore, in those cases where the minimum requirements were met and significance was found, the significance must be handled with caution since certain cells had quite a small number of cases within it, just barely exceeding the minimum number of five (5) cases per cell in some instances.

Though these findings of significance or potential influence must be viewed with caution, it is still valuable to acknowledge and examine the findings of significance between variables using the Chi Square (X^2) statistical test.

*****Age vs. Recidivism Cross-Tabulation (2 year follow-up)**

Count

		Recidivism		Total
		No	Yes	
Age Group	13 or below	7	7	14
	14-16	13	25	38
	17-18	12	4	16
Total		32	36	68

Chi-Square Tests

	Value	df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	7.580 ^a	2	.023
Likelihood Ratio	7.806	2	.020
Linear-by-Linear Association	2.176	1	.140
N of Valid Cases	68		

a. 0 cells (.0%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is 6.59.

With respect to the influence between the two variables of age group and subsequent reoffending, it was determined that age does influence recidivism due to the significance being 0.023. This would indicate that the 14 to 16 age group would be more apt to reoffend than the 17 to 18 age group. However, it must be remembered that the 17 to 18 age group offenders would have turned 18, or would have already been 18 at the on-set, during the two-year follow-up term for re-offense data collection, meaning that these offenses would have been handled through and recorded within the adult system, whose records were not available/accessed for this study.

**Number of Offenders Involved vs. Contract Negotiated/Contract Made
Cross-Tabulation**

Count		Contract Negotiated/Contract Made		Total
		Yes	No	
Number of Offenders Involved	1 Offender	25	6	31
	Multiple Offenders	62	2	64
Total		87	8	95

Chi-Square Tests

	Value	df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)	Exact Sig. (2-sided)	Exact Sig. (1-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	7.133 ^a	1	.008		
Continuity Correction ^b	5.184	1	.023		
Likelihood Ratio	6.635	1	.010		
Fisher's Exact Test				.014	.014
Linear-by-Linear Association	7.058	1	.008		
N of Valid Cases	95				

a. 1 cells (25.0%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is 2.61.

b. Computed only for a 2x2 table

With regard to the variables of the number of offenders involved and contract negotiated/contract made, it was statistically determined that the number of offenders involved does influence whether or not a contract is made as evidenced by the .008 level of significance. One must note that contracts are reached a significant amount of the time, but it was discovered that those cases involving a single offender accounted for a greater amount of the instances where contacts were not reached. This could be explained by the fact that some cases resulted in a decision that a contract was not necessary because each party felt that the mediation was sufficient for redressing the wrongs/harm created as a result of the offense. It could be that victims felt single offenders were more receptive and open during the mediation and, therefore, this would lead to some victims feeling the mediation alone was sufficient for redressing the

wrongs. Furthermore, situations involving multiple offenders may pose the atmosphere where the offenders present a diminished sense of responsibility, since a group committed the offense together. Therefore, this may have led to a lessened likelihood of feeling the mediation itself was sufficient, calling for the necessary construction of a contract. Furthermore, perhaps those situations involving multiple offenders resulted in greater damages, or harm, therefore establishing the necessity for an agreement beyond the mediation. However, one cell, the “multiple offenders not reaching a contract,” did not contain the minimum number of cases required to properly perform the test and neither “no” cell incorporated a significant amount of cases. This would lead one to treat this finding with caution.

Number of Offenders Involved * Type of Contract Negotiated Cross-Tabulation Count

		Type of Contract Negotiated			Total
		Cash	Non-Cash	Combo	
Number of Offenders Involved	1 Offender	15	8	2	25
	Multiple Offenders	19	27	16	62
Total		34	35	18	87

Chi-Square Tests

	Value	df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	7.249 ^a	2	.027
Likelihood Ratio	7.511	2	.023
Linear-by-Linear Association	6.947	1	.008
N of Valid Cases	87		

a. 0 cells (.0%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is 5.17.

With respect to the number of offenders involved and the type of contract negotiated, which was not an original variable included within the study but was only included after the research had gotten underway, it was found that the number of offenders involved does influence the type of contract made. This was found to be the case at the 0.027 level of significance. It was discovered that situations involving single offenders were much more likely to reach a contract that is restitution, or monetarily, based than were situations involving multiple offenders. This could be attributed to the possibility that single offenders, perhaps, do not commit acts that result in such extensive amounts of monetary damage as do offenders who commit delinquent acts in conjunction with others. Therefore, this might result in the single offenders being able to monetarily compensate for the damages their actions resulted in, since the resulting damage was less severe. Oppositely, multiple offenders acting together may commit actions resulting in greater monetary damages. Thus, the cost in damages may be too excessive for the offenders to monetarily compensate and, therefore, an alternative, non-

monetary contract must be resorted to. However, with more offenders, there are more individuals to spread the costs amongst, which would diminish the credibility of this explanation. Therefore, if these two variables do, in fact, vary with or influence one another, further research will need to be done to investigate into the dynamics of and explanations for this relationship. Additionally, it may be an intervening factor, which is not accounted for here that influences the type of contract made, as opposed to the number of offenders truly playing a significant role.

Type of Contract Negotiated * Recidivism Cross-Tabulation

Count		Recidivism		Total
		No	Yes	
Type of Contract Negotiated	Cash	15	13	28
	Non-Cash	14	10	24
	Combo	0	10	10
Total		29	33	62

Chi-Square Tests

	Value	df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	10.596 ^a	2	.005
Likelihood Ratio	14.417	2	.001
Linear-by-Linear Association	5.222	1	.022
N of Valid Cases	62		

a. 1 cells (16.7%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is 4.68.

In examining the potential influence that the type of contract negotiated might have over recidivism, it was found that the type of contract negotiated does influence recidivism. There does appear to be a relationship between the two variables on the surface. The research reflects that those striking a contract that contains both monetary and non-monetary components are significantly more likely to reoffend than those offenders who reach a strictly monetary or strictly non-monetary contract. This could be attributed to the idea that those striking a contract with both monetary and non-monetary components may have committed more severe, extensive acts resulting in more significant damages and harms, possibility to a greater number of victims, observing that there is a multi-faceted approach to redressing the wrongs. However, there might be some underlying factors not directly considered that may be accounting for this occurrence. Also, there is a single cell that does not contain the minimum of five (5) cases within it, which renders that the data does not fulfill the required criteria for the test to run properly.

Conclusions and Implications

The overall hypothesis, personal characteristics of offenders does influence the effectiveness of the Victim-Offender Reconciliation Program (VORP), cannot be supported. Although there were instances of significance found, supporting the influence of certain independent variables upon dependent variables, the limited variability posed by the sample inhibits the ability or willingness to state confidently that personal characteristics of offenders influence the effectiveness of VORP or VOM. The statistical test used, the Chi Square (X^2), requires that a minimum number of cases, five (5), be present within each cell for the test to run properly and accurately. This minimum requirement was not met in all cases. The limited variation leads to the apprehension in accepting the select few significant results, due to limited cases to proficiently run statistical tests.

There was extremely limited variability within the sample, specifically with regard to such variables as sex, offense type, previous offenses, reaching/negotiating a contract agreement, and successful completion of those negotiated contracts. Several of the characteristics were highly uniform within the sample. It was found that there was an extremely high rate of reaching/negotiating a contract and successfully fulfilling reached/negotiated contracts. Therefore, it is concluded that the Ohio agency's VORP is highly successful with regard to its objectives of bringing victims and offenders together, in an attempt to negotiate/reach a contract satisfactory to both parties and have that reached/negotiated contract successfully completed/fulfilled. Therefore, regardless of personal offender characteristics or characteristics of the offense/situation, these objectives of reaching/negotiating a contract and fulfilling that reached/negotiated contract, the VORP is highly successful. With these high levels of reaching a contract and successfully completing the made contract, regardless of personal characteristics, it is not statistically significant that these independent variables, personal characteristics, and dependent variables, measures of program effectiveness, influence one another. Therefore, one must conclude that these variables, personal characteristics of offenders/situations and program effectiveness, are independent of one another. However, there was limited variability within the personal characteristics' department as well, so it would be advisable to examine further this idea of personal characteristics and effectiveness of the program to determine whether or not a relationship exists, with some recommended amendments to the original approach. These recommendations are to follow shortly.

In addressing recidivism, the data that were able to be obtained and analyzed reflected that 32 of the participants in the VORP during the time assessed were not reoffenders, while 36 of the participants did commit subsequent reoffenses. Therefore, examining potential methods or techniques to attempt to alleviate the incidence of reoffending and pursuing approaches to implement such efforts would be a beneficial response and a worthy area upon which to place one's focus. This area of the study would benefit from further research that is revised in its approach. Recommendations for further/future research are to follow.

Suggestions for Future Work

For those who may be interested in examining a similar area of study, there are some things that may be worth pondering. If this researcher were to perform this research study a second time or she were to advise someone who would desire to take the reins and steer/gear the research into a bit of a different direction, she would encourage future researchers to look into the possibility of a larger sample size that would incorporate a more diverse offender population/sample. To go hand-in-hand with that, this researcher would encourage future

researchers along the same research vein to examine larger VOM programs in larger, metropolitan/urban areas that would offer a larger, more diverse offender population. Additionally, she would encourage the incorporation of a comparison group where characteristically equivalent/similar groups are each exposed to a different treatment/correctional method and subsequently compared based upon effectiveness of the correctional method – measured by recidivism. This would involve three groups of offenders, similar in the characteristics they demonstrate, with group one being exposed to juvenile detention, another being exposed to probation, and the third exposed to VOM. After completion of the correctional methods, it might be interesting to compare subsequent reoffenses committed during a one or two-year follow-up term to determine effectiveness of each correctional method, or at the very least arrive at some additional insight into the scope of recidivism. Additionally, the researcher in this study would direct future researchers toward the possibility of interviewing participants, both victims and offenders, in VOM programs to gauge their satisfaction levels and determine the perceived benefits as offered from the victims and offenders' perspectives. Lastly, this researcher would encourage future researchers to attempt to gain access to both Juvenile Court System and Adult Court System records, in order to get as accurate insight into the phenomenon of recidivism as one can. To accompany that, it would also be beneficial to gain access to as many surrounding county records as one can, to aid in capturing the incidence of recidivism in to the most accurate extent in which one is able.

Appreciation and Gratitude

It would be an injustice to not recognize those who have made this research project possible. This researcher would like to extend her sincerest thanks and gratitude to the Ohio agency and all those on staff for generously opening up their doors to her and allowing her to conduct this research project on their Victim-Offender Reconciliation Program (VORP). Specifically, this researcher would like to acknowledge the generous efforts of the VORP Coordinator at the Ohio agency for her immensely valuable contributions to this study through providing insight, materials, and information, as well as corresponding with the Juvenile Probation Departments of the two referring counties to request recidivism information from their records in regard to specific offenders. The Juvenile Probation Departments of both referring counties also deserve significant recognition in devoting their time and resources to providing this valuable information on previous offenses and recidivism to this research study. This researcher cannot commend the VORP coordinator nor the Ohio agency enough for all their contributions to this research study. Furthermore, this researcher would also like to thank Dr. Don Knueve for his instrumental role in this project and unwavering encouragement throughout the entire process. He provided tremendous insight and knowledge in the conduction of this research project. Professor Jeffrey Weaner also generously provided assistance with the data analysis and statistical portion of this research study, which is sincerely appreciated. Additionally, this study would not have been possible had it not been for the approval of the Institutional Review Board (IRB). Therefore, this researcher would like to extend her sincerest gratitude to the board for allowing her to conduct this research. Lastly, this researcher believes it is important to point out that she was inspired to write this section of appreciation and gratitude by one of her fellow classmates, Ashley Meekins. This researcher thought it was truly admirable of Ms. Meekins to acknowledge and show appreciation for those who made her research study possible, which, in turn, inspired her to do the same. This researcher just thought it was essential that she credit her source of inspiration and motivation for this closing section of her research paper. Thank you!

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