

The Next Step

Indigenous Development of Neighborhood-Restorative Community Justice

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The challenge for modern crime-control policies is that they must work simultaneously across multiple environments within communities that are characterized by overlapping needs, issues, and service providers. Policy responses to crime must do more than capture and punish criminals, because crime is a deeply embedded social problem, and effective crime control requires more than a traditional justice system can offer. This article explores the effect of blending the theoretical underpinnings of restorative and community justice as an indigenous product of neighborhoods. Indigenous neighborhood processes may be able to address institutional and social structure problems to improve the quality of life for area residents and restorative outcomes for victims, the community, and the offender.

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The policy challenge for crime control in modern societies is that, to be effective, policies must work simultaneously in a multidimensional environment characterized by overlapping needs, issues, and service providers within individual communities. Acknowledgement of a multidimensional environment also recognizes that crime problems do not occur in a social vacuum. Crime is a deeply embedded social problem, and policy responses to crime must do more than capture and punish criminals. Street crime, for example, is highly concentrated in neighborhoods that suffer multiple deprivations. These types of neighborhoods have layer upon layer of adverse social conditions—high birth rates among school-age children, youngest parents, largest families, most single-parent families, fewest families with health insurance, lowest family income, highest unemployment, lowest property values, poorest schools, fewest jobs, fewest grocery stores, active street gangs, open air drug markets, street prostitution, progressive loss of middle-class residents, and a rising sense of helplessness, hopelessness, and fatalism among residents who remain (Anderson, 1990; Wilson, 1987). Punishment-oriented policies do little to help residents repair these conditions or stabilize their neighborhoods. Despite this, the traditional justice system is unlikely to be replaced by alternative approaches to justice in the foreseeable future. That said, increased application of restorative and community justice principles and practices could offer new strategies that work synergistically and more effectively within the multidimensional environment of modern society.

