

Utilizing Restorative Justice to Reconcile a War-Torn Society in Sri Lanka: Catalyzing Social Transformation

*Epigraph: "From the ashes of conflict, the threads of justice are woven,
binding wounds and kindling the flames of transformation."*

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ABSTRACT

The restoration of justice in post-conflict societies plays a pivotal role in catalyzing social transformation and reconciliation. This research paper delves into the case of Sri Lanka, a nation scarred by years of conflict, to explore how harnessing restorative justice mechanisms can facilitate the healing and reintegration of a war-torn society. In the wake of prolonged armed conflict, post-conflict societies are often characterised by fractured social structures, lingering trauma, and a fragile sense of unity. This research paper delves into the imperative challenge of restoring justice in the context of a war-torn society, specifically in the North and Eastern provinces of Sri Lanka, where decades of civil war have left scars that transcend physical devastation. The paper explores the potential of restorative justice mechanisms to serve as catalysts for social transformation and reconciliation in such environments. Through an extensive literature review, this study investigates the objectives, challenges, and potential outcomes of restorative justice initiatives. The methodology involves a comprehensive analysis of existing data and scholarly works to provide insights that can inform policy recommendations for sustainable peace and societal harmony. Harnessing restorative justice principles can play a transformative role in facilitating the healing and integration of societies fractured by war.

KEYWORDS: Catalyzing, challenge, conflicts, Eastern, harnessing, North, provinces, justice, mechanisms, reconciliation, restorative, society, Sri Lanka, transformative, war-torn

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INTRODUCTION

Background

The persistent struggles faced by societies in the Northern and Eastern provinces of Sri Lanka highlight the complexities of rebuilding societal bonds, trust, and cohesiveness in the aftermath of protracted conflict. Harnessing restorative justice principles can play a transformative role in facilitating the healing and integration of societies fractured by war. In grappling with the legacies of conflict, efforts to restore justice must consider not only legal mechanisms but also the social, cultural, and emotional dimensions of reconciliation.

Sri Lanka, a nation emerging from decades of internal strife, serves as a pertinent case study for examining how restorative justice can aid post-conflict reconciliation. This research aims to investigate the potential of restorative justice to contribute to the process of reconciling a war-torn society and catalyzing sustainable social transformation. By examining core objectives, research questions, and existing literature, this study aims to shed light on the complexities, challenges, and opportunities presented by restorative justice approaches in such contexts.

This paper argues that restorative justice, with its emphasis on healing, dialogue, and community involvement, holds particular promise for post-conflict societies such as Sri Lanka. It explores how restorative mechanisms can foster empathy, accountability, and inclusive nation-building in environments characterized by trauma, mistrust and ethnic division.

Background Context

To contextualize the significance of restorative justice in Sri Lanka, it is imperative to outline the origins and key milestones of the country's civil war, which stemmed largely from ethnic tensions between the Sinhalese majority and the Tamil minority.

The civil war, which lasted from 1983 to 2009, was primarily fought between the Sri Lankan government and the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE), a separatist group advocating an independent Tamil homeland in the Northern and Eastern provinces. The conflict was marked by intense violence, displacement, and atrocities committed by both sides, leading to a profound humanitarian crisis. Key events such as the Black July riots of 1983 where anti-Tamil pogroms erupted across the country and intermittent ceasefire attempts shaped the trajectory of the war and exacerbated ethnic divides. The war resulted in the deaths of an estimated 80,000 to 100,000 people and left deep scars across communities. Ethnic polarization, political marginalization, and psychological trauma have become entrenched in the social fabric. The devastation went beyond physical destruction; it eroded trust, fractured national identity, and created a legacy of collective grief and resentment.

As the armed conflict ended in 2009, the focus shifted from military victory to the formidable challenge of reconciliation. Rebuilding a sense of justice, unity, and shared identity is essential to ensure long-term peace and prevent the recurrence of violence. However, post-war efforts to achieve transitional justice are often met with political resistance, selective memory, and competing narratives of victimhood.

In this context, restorative justice has emerged as a compelling alternative to conventional retributive systems. By prioritizing inclusivity, community dialogue, and healing, restorative justice offers a framework for addressing victims' grievances, facilitating accountability, and mending fractured social relationships. Sri Lanka's cultural and ethnic diversity further complicates this task, requiring approaches that are sensitive to local values, traditions and historical grievances.

Therefore, this study situates itself within the broader discourse on transitional justice and peacebuilding, aiming to explore how restorative justice mechanisms can be contextually adapted to address Sri Lanka's unique post-conflict realities and contribute to sustainable social transformation.

Research Problem

The research problem for this study revolves around the challenge of reconciling a deeply fractured and war-torn society, specifically in the context of Sri Lanka, through the implementation of restorative justice mechanisms.

Problem Statement

Decades of civil war in Sri Lanka have left an indelible mark on its society, characterized by profound divisions, trauma, and a shattered sense of national unity. As the nation strives to rebuild and transition towards lasting peace, the question of how to effectively reconcile a society torn apart by violence and foster social transformation that promotes healing and unity becomes an urgent and complex problem.

Key Aspects of the Problem:

I. Fractured Social Fabric: The civil war has engendered deep-seated divisions, mistrust, and animosity among different ethnic and religious groups. The problem lies in addressing these fractures and finding ways to re-knit the social fabric.

II. Lingering Trauma: The conflict has left individuals and communities scarred by psychological trauma. The challenge is to facilitate healing conversations that address trauma and enable individuals to move beyond their pain.

III. Accountability and Justice: Balancing the need for justice with the imperative of reconciliation is another facet of this problem. Identifying the mechanisms that provide a sense of justice while fostering reconciliation is a delicate task.

IV. Cultural Sensitivity: Sri Lanka's cultural diversity adds complexity to this problem. Any approach to reconciliation and social transformation must consider these cultural nuances and avoid exacerbating the existing tensions.

V. Sustainability: How can the restoration of justice catalyze sustained social transformation? Ensuring that positive changes are enduring and not short-lived is a challenge.

VI. Operationalization of Restorative Justice: While the concept of restorative justice holds promise, its practical implementation within Sri Lanka's context poses a problem owing to institutional capacities, political dynamics, and community engagement.

Research Gap

While the existing literature explores post-conflict reconciliation and the principles of restorative justice, there is a gap in understanding how these principles can be effectively applied in a complex and culturally diverse context such as Sri Lanka.

The problem is not only about understanding the theoretical aspects but also about developing actionable strategies for harnessing restorative justice to catalyze social transformation and facilitate genuine reconciliation.

The research problem revolves around the challenge of reconciling a war-torn society in Sri Lanka while harnessing the principles of restorative justice to initiate transformative social change. This problem encompasses the intricate dynamics of healing, accountability, cultural understanding, and long-term sustainability. Addressing this problem is crucial not only for Sri Lanka but also for other societies navigating post-conflict landscapes.

Research Objectives

The primary objectives of this research are as follows:

- I. To understand the concept of restorative justice and its relevance in post-conflict societies.
- II. To examine the challenges and limitations of implementing restorative justice mechanisms in a war-torn society.
- III. To explore the potential outcomes of successful restorative justice initiatives in fostering reconciliation and social transformation in Sri Lanka.

Research Questions

This study addresses the following questions:

- I. What is the concept of restorative justice, and how does it apply to post-conflict situations?
- II. What are the key challenges in implementing restorative justice mechanisms in societies emerging from conflict?
- III. How can successful restorative justice initiatives contribute to social transformation and reconciliation in war-torn societies such as Sri Lanka?

LITERATURE REVIEW

The literature on restorative justice and post-conflict reconciliation provides a broad spectrum of theoretical frameworks and empirical case studies that illuminate the promise and complexity of implementing such mechanisms in divided societies. This review critically examines existing scholarship on restorative justice, exploring its core principles, global applications, and specific relevance to Sri Lanka. Restorative justice has emerged as a compelling alternative to retributive justice, particularly in societies recovering from large-scale violence. Grounded in the principles of healing, empathy, and community participation, it seeks to repair harm by fostering dialogue among victims, offenders, and the wider community. Braithwaite (2002) offers foundational insights into the philosophy of restorative justice, emphasizing the transformative potential of inclusive, participatory justice processes. However, his analysis largely draws on Western liberal democracies, where institutional support for restorative practices is comparatively strong. The transferability of such models to deeply divided societies, such as Sri Lanka, marked by entrenched ethnic divisions and post-colonial state dynamics, requires careful contextual adaptation.

Marshall (2003) and Umbreit & Coates (1993) similarly advocate for restorative approaches as mechanisms for rebuilding trust and relationships in fractured communities. While their works provide a solid theoretical grounding, they tend to assume a level of social cohesion and political that may not be present in post-conflict societies emerging from civil wars.

Global case studies demonstrate the varied success of restorative justice in post-conflict scenarios. For instance, Clark (2010) documents the role of Rwanda's Gacaca courts in facilitating truth-telling, forgiveness, and reintegration after the 1994 genocide. The community-based model fostered ownership of the reconciliation process but was not without criticism, including concerns about due process and political manipulation. Similarly, South Africa's Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC), analyzed by Hayner (2002), enabled the public acknowledgement of harm and promoted national healing. However, its emphasis on amnesty over punitive

measures has drawn criticism, particularly from victims who feel that justice has not been served.

These examples offer valuable insights but also highlight the limitations. While both Rwanda and South Africa created forums for storytelling and healing, their mechanisms operated within specific historical, political, and cultural frameworks that differ significantly from those in Sri Lanka. The comparative applicability of these models should be approached with caution.

Strang and Sherman (2003) identify key obstacles to restorative justice, including residual animosities, institutional weakness, and power asymmetries that can hinder open dialogue. Umbreit (2001) notes that even when restorative practices are introduced, their success often depends on community trust, which is difficult to achieve in settings where political actors manipulate justice narratives for strategic gains.

Turning to the Sri Lankan context, the literature reflects cautious optimism. The decades-long civil war between the Sri Lankan government and the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) resulted in mass displacement, militarization, and the erosion of inter-ethnic trust. Korf (2012) argues that the post-war period in Sri Lanka has been dominated by competing narratives of victimhood, complicating efforts to establish shared truths or pursue mutual understanding. Moreover, Sri Lanka's pluralistic society, characterized by distinct Sinhalese and Tamil cultural traditions, poses challenges to implementing a one-size-fits-all restorative justice model. Seneviratne (2011) highlights that any justice mechanism must be grounded in local traditions and engage religious and community leaders to gain legitimacy. This aligns with broader critiques of restorative justice's Western-centric assumptions, suggesting that cultural specificity is key to success.

Despite these challenges, the literature affirms the potential of restorative justice to foster meaningful dialogue, rebuild trust, and contribute to sustainable peace. It can play a particularly vital role in addressing psychosocial wounds and interpersonal trauma, which punitive justice often neglects. However, to realize its potential in Sri Lanka, restorative justice must be critically and carefully adapted—not only to the country's legal and institutional realities but also to its complex ethnic, religious and historical landscape.

In summary, while restorative justice holds promise as a tool for social transformation, the literature reveals a clear need for context-sensitive applications. Its success depends not only on theoretical alignment with reconciliation goals but also on navigating political realities, cultural norms and the scars of historical grievances. This study builds on these insights to explore how restorative justice can be tailored to Sri Lanka's post-conflict needs and contribute to long-term social healing in the country.

Materials & Methodology

This study employed a qualitative research approach and utilized a desk-based methodology. The primary sources of data included academic papers, reports, policy documents and case studies related to restorative justice and conflict reconciliation. A systematic review of the existing literature was conducted to extract relevant information and insights. The analysis involved thematic categorization to identify patterns, challenges, and opportunities associated with restorative justice implementation. The selection of Rwanda and South Africa as case studies was based on their relevance to Sri Lanka in terms of post-conflict reconciliation processes.

Both countries offer distinct yet instructive models of restorative justice, providing comparative insights for potential application in the Sri Lankan context. This choice was informed by the availability of comprehensive documentation and scholarly analyses of transitional justice mechanisms. However, reliance on secondary sources for these case studies introduces certain limitations. Desk-based research inherently depends on existing literature, which often reflects the perspectives of academics, policymakers, or institutions with publishing access, potentially overlooking grassroots narratives and community-level experiences. Moreover, the absence of primary data restricted the ability to capture real-time developments or firsthand accounts, which could offer a more nuanced understanding of the issues explored. Acknowledging these limitations was essential for maintaining transparency and contextualizing the study's findings.

Research Philosophy

This research study is rooted in interpretivism. Interpretivism is a philosophical stance that seeks to understand complex social phenomena within their specific context, emphasizing the subjective meanings attributed by individuals and the importance of context in shaping these meanings. In the context of this research, interpretivism is particularly relevant because of the multifaceted nature of post-conflict societies and the intricate dynamics of restorative justice implementation. The interpretivism philosophy aligns well with the research's goal of comprehensively understanding how restorative justice can contribute to social transformation in Sri Lanka. By considering various viewpoints, cultural nuances, and historical influences, this study seeks to uncover the intricate web of factors that shape the potential success and challenges of implementing restorative justice.

The interpretive research philosophy serves as the foundation for exploring the complexities of harnessing the restoration of justice to reconcile a war-torn society in Sri Lanka and catalyze social transformation. This enables a nuanced understanding

of the subjective meanings attributed to justice and transformation while considering the contextual intricacies that define the post-conflict landscape.

Research Approach

This study adopts a qualitative research approach to comprehensively explore the feasibility and potential outcomes of harnessing the restoration of justice to reconcile a war-torn society in Sri Lanka. Qualitative methodology allows for an in-depth understanding of the complex dynamics within post-conflict societies and the nuances associated with implementing restorative justice mechanisms.

Conflict of Interest Statement

The authors declare no conflicts of interest. This study was conducted independently and is based solely on the analysis of the existing literature and secondary data. No financial, personal, or professional affiliations influenced the outcomes or interpretations of this study.

Data Collection

The primary data sources for this study are scholarly literature, academic articles, reports, policy documents, and case studies related to post-conflict reconciliation, restorative justice, and Sri Lanka's civil war.

An extensive literature review is conducted to establish a foundational understanding of key concepts and identify gaps, challenges, and potential opportunities in the context of harnessing restorative justice.

As this study is based solely on publicly available secondary data from academic and policy-oriented sources, no new datasets were generated or analyzed during the current research. All materials referenced are accessible through academic databases, institutional repositories, or public websites and can be obtained upon reasonable request.

Data Analysis

Thematic analysis was employed to extract meaningful insights from the collected data. The analysis focuses on identifying recurring themes, challenges, success factors, and possible recommendations related to the application of restorative justice in post-conflict settings. Through a systematic and iterative process, this analysis aims to provide a comprehensive overview of the various dimensions of restorative justice in the Sri Lankan context.

Case Studies

Selected case studies from countries such as Rwanda and South Africa, where restorative justice mechanisms have been implemented, are examined to draw parallels and insights applicable to the Sri Lankan context. These case studies serve as valuable sources of practical knowledge, highlighting the potential benefits and challenges of implementing restorative justice in societies grappling with post-conflict challenges.

Ethical Considerations

Ethical considerations are paramount when conducting research in sensitive contexts, such as post-conflict societies. This study ensured ethical sourcing and use of data, giving due credit to authors and respecting the voices and experiences of those affected by conflict. Ethical guidelines for conducting qualitative research were adhered to throughout the data collection and analysis processes.

Limitations

It is important to acknowledge that this study relies primarily on existing data sources, which may not capture all the nuances of Sri Lanka's unique post-conflict landscape. Additionally, the study is limited by language barriers that may restrict access to certain relevant sources.

Validity and Reliability

To ensure the validity and reliability of the study's findings, multiple sources of information were cross-referenced, and a systematic approach to data analysis was adopted. The insights derived from the case studies were triangulated with theoretical perspectives and expert opinions in the field of restorative justice.

In conclusion, the Materials and Methodology section outlines a qualitative research approach involving data collection through an extensive literature review, thematic analysis, and examination of relevant case studies. This approach facilitates a comprehensive understanding of the potential of restorative justice to catalyze social transformation in Sri Lanka's war-torn society.

RESULTS & DISCUSSION

The Results and Discussion section presents the findings of the literature review and thematic analysis. It addresses the challenges and limitations encountered in implementing restorative justice in post-conflict settings, while also highlighting the potential benefits and outcomes. This discussion critically evaluates the applicability of restorative justice mechanisms to the Sri Lankan context, considering the cultural, social, and political factors that influence reconciliation and social transformation processes.

To deepen the analysis, the discussion incorporates comparisons with the case studies of Rwanda and South Africa. Analyzing the similarities and differences in the challenges faced and outcomes achieved in these contexts will provide valuable insights for Sri Lanka. For instance, comparing Sri Lanka's post-conflict scenario with Rwanda's Gacaca courts reveals both potential and limitations. While Rwanda's approach enabled community participation and facilitated a sense of local ownership in the reconciliation process, applying a similar model in Sri Lanka would necessitate careful adaptation to suit its unique ethnic, religious and cultural dynamics.

Similarly, South Africa's Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) demonstrated how public acknowledgement of harm and state-supported restorative practices foster national healing. However, the South African experience also highlighted the risk of perceived impunity and the importance of genuine accountability—lessons that are critical when designing restorative justice frameworks for Sri Lanka.

By engaging in such a comparative analysis, the discussion will not only contextualize Sri Lanka's challenges but also draw on international experiences to propose context-sensitive, sustainable approaches to restorative justice in the aftermath of conflict.

Through a comprehensive review of the literature, case studies, and expert opinions, several key findings have emerged regarding the potential of harnessing the restoration of justice to reconcile a war-torn society in Sri Lanka and catalyze social transformation.

(i) Positive Outcomes of Restorative Justice

The analysis reveals that the successful implementation of restorative justice mechanisms in post-conflict societies has yielded positive outcomes. Case studies from Rwanda and South Africa demonstrate that when victims and perpetrators engage in dialogue, it fosters empathy, humanizes the "other", and contributes to healing (Clark 2010; Hayner 2002). These outcomes resonate with the fundamental principles of restorative justice: acknowledging harm, facilitating healing, and building relationships.

(ii) Community Engagement and Empowerment

Restorative justice processes that involve affected communities empower them to play an active role in reconciliation. The Gacaca courts in Rwanda allowed communities to participate in delivering justice, creating a sense of ownership and collective healing (Clark 2010). Similarly, community engagement and dialogue can provide Sri Lankan communities with the agency to shape their own reconciliation journeys.

(iii) Challenges in Implementation

However, challenges persist in the practical application of restorative justice, especially in post-conflict settings such as Sri Lanka. The deeply ingrained divisions and narratives of victimhood present barriers to open dialogue and empathy (Strang & Sherman, 2003). Additionally, the legacy of political interference, resource constraints, and the question of whether restorative justice can hold high-level perpetrators accountable pose significant hurdles (Umbreit, 2001).

The findings from the case studies underscore the significant contextual relevance of restorative justice in Sri Lanka's post-conflict landscape. The civil war created deep and pervasive schisms between the Sinhalese and Tamil communities, making it imperative to rebuild relationships and heal the profound emotional and psychological wounds left by decades of conflict. The emphasis of restorative justice on dialogue, understanding, and mutual recognition of pain and suffering aligns closely with the need to address the deeply embedded and nuanced narratives of victimhood and trauma that exist within both communities.

Sri Lanka's rich cultural diversity presents both unique challenges and significant opportunities for the effective implementation of restorative justice. Adapting restorative justice principles to resonate with the distinct cultural values, beliefs, and norms of the Sinhalese and Tamil communities is essential for ensuring their relevance and efficacy (Korf, 2012). By integrating traditional conflict resolution mechanisms, which are deeply rooted in the cultural practices of these communities, it is possible to bridge the gaps between modern restorative justice practices and cultural sensitivities, thereby enhancing the acceptance and effectiveness of such interventions.

The integration of restorative justice with broader peace-building strategies is crucial for addressing the multifaceted nature of post-conflict recovery in the DRC. While restorative justice focuses on addressing interpersonal harm and fostering reconciliation at the individual and community levels, it must be complemented by comprehensive efforts to address the structural inequalities and historical injustices that fuel conflict (Korf, 2012). This comprehensive approach includes elements such as truth-telling, reparations, and institutional reform, all of which are necessary for achieving long-term sustainable peace.

Political commitment is pivotal for the success of restorative justice initiatives. Sri Lanka's leaders must demonstrate a genuine and sustained commitment to reconciliation that transcends political interests and partisan agendas. This commitment is essential for creating an enabling environment in which restorative justice practices can flourish. Additionally, active community participation is crucial for the legitimacy, credibility, and sustainability of such initiatives. The involvement of

community members ensures that restorative justice processes are grounded in local realities and are responsive to the needs and aspirations of those most affected by conflict.

Restorative justice has the transformative potential to bridge the gap between victim and offender groups and foster a sense of shared humanity and mutual empathy. By creating spaces for dialogue where individuals can share their experiences, understand the pain and perspectives of the other side, and acknowledge each other's suffering, restorative justice can contribute to building bridges of empathy, understanding, and unity. This process of humanizing the 'other' and recognizing shared experiences of suffering is crucial for breaking down the barriers of mistrust and animosity that have been built over years of conflict.

In conclusion, the results highlight both the promise and challenges of harnessing restorative justice to reconcile a war-torn society in Sri Lanka. While the positive outcomes of restorative justice are evident in terms of fostering dialogue, understanding, and reconciliation, it is crucial to confront the complexities of deeply rooted divisions, cultural nuances, and political dynamics to ensure meaningful and sustainable implementation. Integrating restorative justice within a broader, contextually sensitive approach to reconciliation, which includes addressing structural inequalities and historical injustices, offers a promising pathway to catalyze social transformation and achieve lasting peace in Sri Lanka.

Recommendations

Based on the findings and discussions presented in this research, the following recommendations are proposed to effectively harness restorative justice for reconciling a war-torn society in Sri Lanka and catalyzing long-term social transformation. These recommendations address the key challenges identified in the literature and analysis, while offering specific, actionable steps that can guide policymakers, practitioners, and community stakeholders.

(i) Contextualized Implementation

Restorative justice initiatives must be tailored to reflect Sri Lanka's unique ethno-religious and cultural diversity. Dialogue processes, reparative actions, and community engagement strategies must be culturally embedded and linguistically inclusive. Collaboration with cultural anthropologists, religious leaders, and local historians is essential to ensure that justice mechanisms are not perceived as externally imposed but are organically rooted in local traditions.

For example, traditional conflict resolution practices found in Tamil Hindu temples and Sinhalese Buddhist village councils could be integrated into the restorative justice process, creating legitimacy and local buy-in.

(ii) Community-Led Restorative Forums

Encourage the creation of community-led restorative justice forums that serve as safe spaces for victims, offenders, and affected community members to engage in dialogue. These forums should be designed to prioritize inclusivity, trust building, and truth telling.

Drawing on New Zealand's Family Group Conferences, Sri Lanka could develop a culturally adapted model that brings together multiple stakeholders—including families, elders, and religious leaders—to collectively address the harms caused by the conflict and agree on reparative actions.

(iii) Integrated Healing and Trauma Support

Recognize the deep psychological wounds inflicted by war by integrating trauma-informed care into restorative processes. Trained counsellors and psychosocial support teams should be part of restorative justice programs to address both the visible and invisible scars of war.

This may involve mobile trauma recovery units or partnerships with mental health NGOs to provide ongoing support to conflict-affected communities, especially in the Northern and Eastern provinces.

(iv) Multi-Level Stakeholder Engagement

Establish a national framework that brings together government actors, civil society organizations, religious institutions, youth networks, and international partners to work together to combat child labour. A collaborative approach ensures political commitment, institutional support, and grassroots legitimacy for restorative justice efforts.

The creation of a National Restorative Justice Council, similar to Rwanda's National Unity and Reconciliation Commission, could serve as a coordinating body overseeing pilot projects, guidelines, and accountability.

(v) Cross-Generational Dialogue and Memory Preservation

Facilitating structured dialogue between generations to bridge gaps in understanding and prevent the recurrence of conflict. Intergenerational workshops, oral history projects, and peace storytelling programs can help young people understand the complexities of the past and envision a peaceful future.

Schools and local media can partner with survivors, historians, and artists to document personal testimonies and lessons learned from the conflict.

(vi) Education and Public Awareness Campaigns

Integrating restorative justice into school curricula, civic education programs, and community awareness campaigns is also recommended. Teaching the values of empathy, forgiveness, and mutual respect from an early age can foster a culture of peace.

Educational toolkits, theatre-based learning, and multilingual media content can be developed in collaboration with the Ministry of Education and NGOs specializing in peace education.

(vii) International Collaboration and Adaptation of Best Practices

Partner with countries and institutions that have successfully implemented restorative justice in post-conflict settings. International collaborations can offer valuable insights, technical expertise, and resource mobilization opportunities.

For example, insights from Canada's Indigenous restorative justice programs or Colombia's transitional justice models can inform Sri Lanka's culturally nuanced approaches.

(viii) Long-Term Monitoring, Evaluation, and Flexibility

Develop a robust monitoring and evaluation (M&E) framework to track the progress, challenges, and outcomes of restorative justice initiatives. Feedback loops that allow for continuous learning and course correction should be established.

Metrics may include community trust indices, reconciliation indicators, and qualitative assessments of emotional healing and social cohesion.

These recommendations aim to move beyond theory and provide practical, context-sensitive strategies for realizing the potential of restorative justice in Sri Lanka's post-conflict landscape. By drawing on both global best practices and local cultural wisdom, Sri Lanka can foster an inclusive, effective, and sustainable reconciliation process.

Policymakers, civil society leaders, educators, and community members all play a role in shaping a just and united future. With political will, community engagement, and a commitment to healing, restorative justice can serve as a mechanism of redress and a foundation for transformative peace in Sri Lanka.

CONCLUSION

The journey undertaken in this research "Harnessing Restoration of Justice for Reconciling a War-Torn Society in Sri Lanka: Catalyzing Social Transformation" sheds light on the multifaceted potential of restorative justice in post-conflict reconciliation. It traverses the complexities of historical trauma, the resilience of

communities, and the challenges of healing fractured societies. By analyzing global models and focusing on Sri Lanka's unique socio-political context, this study reaffirms the transformative power of restorative justice.

The findings highlight that while restorative justice offers profound benefits such as healing, empathy building, and community empowerment, its application must be adapted to Sri Lanka's diverse ethnic, cultural, and historical landscape. The potential for social transformation lies not only in adopting restorative practices but also in doing so in a culturally sensitive and inclusive manner. The recommendations proposed, including community-led initiatives, trauma-informed support systems, and intergenerational dialogue, offer a roadmap toward meaningful reconciliation.

Implementing these recommendations could mark a significant milestone in Sri Lanka's journey toward healing and reconciliation. Similar to the success of Rwanda's Gacaca courts or New Zealand's Family Group Conferences, Sri Lanka can adopt contextually tailored mechanisms that bridge the gap between victims, offenders, and communities. These initiatives can nurture trust, rebuild relationships, and promote long-lasting peace.

However, restorative justice should not be implemented in isolation. It must be embedded within a broader reconciliation framework that addresses structural inequalities, ensures truth-telling, upholds human rights and fosters inclusive national narratives. This holistic approach is essential for achieving enduring peace and social transformation.

Importantly, this study emphasizes that reconciliation is not a one-time event but a continuous process. It requires unwavering political will, grassroots participation, and the synergy of various societal actors, including policymakers, civil society, educators, and victims themselves. Education and awareness play pivotal roles in shaping future generations with the values of empathy, justice, and peace.

This research also underscores the necessity for ongoing monitoring and long-term evaluation of restorative justice initiatives. Future research should focus on longitudinal studies to assess the sustained impact of these processes on interethnic relations, community cohesion and national healing. Such studies will enrich the field by providing evidence-based insights into what works, what needs adaptation, and what new strategies might be required, and will open avenues for comparative studies across different post-conflict contexts, fostering global knowledge exchange and mutual learning. It encourages interdisciplinary collaboration across conflict studies, transitional justice, sociology, psychology, and public policy — a synergy that is vital for developing comprehensive solutions to complex post-war realities.

In essence, this research is not merely a conclusion but a call to action. It is an invitation for scholars, practitioners, and communities to continue the dialogue,

deepen the exploration, and work collaboratively toward a reconciled Sri Lanka. The voices and experiences of those affected by conflict echo throughout this work, reminding us that justice, when restorative in nature, has the power not only to repair but also to transform.

Although the road to reconciliation is long and fraught with challenges, it is a path worth pursuing. With compassion, inclusivity, and resilience, Sri Lanka can turn the page from conflict to cooperation, trauma to healing, and division to unity. This research contributes to that vision — a future where the scars of war become testimonies of human strength, and where peace is not a distant hope but a lived reality.

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