

# Restorative Justice Circles and Recidivism

*A Qualitative Exploration of First-Time Juvenile Offenders in Cape Town's Townships*

**Thandeka Nkosi<sup>1</sup>**

*Wits Business School*

**Correspondence:** [tnkosi@outlook.com](mailto:tnkosi@outlook.com)

Received: 02 September 2001 | Accepted: 30 October 2001 | Published: 09 December 2001 | DOI:

[10.5281/zenodo.18943824](https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.18943824)

## ABSTRACT

High rates of juvenile recidivism in South Africa's township communities present a significant social challenge. Restorative justice practices, particularly peacemaking circles, have been introduced as community-based alternatives to formal court proceedings, yet their specific impact on first-time young offenders remains under-researched. This study aimed to explore the lived experiences of first-time juvenile offenders participating in restorative justice circles, and to understand the perceived mechanisms through which these circles might influence reoffending behaviour. A qualitative, interpretive phenomenological design was employed. Data were collected via in-depth, semi-structured interviews with a purposively selected sample of 24 first-time offenders who had completed a circle process. Thematic analysis was conducted using NVivo software. A dominant theme was the transformative role of community accountability and symbolic reparation. Participants reported that facing their victims and community elders instilled a profound sense of responsibility absent from court appearances. Approximately three-quarters of participants explicitly linked their sustained desistance to the shame of public accountability within a supportive, rather than punitive, framework. The findings suggest that restorative justice circles can disrupt pathways to reoffending for first-time juvenile offenders by fostering socio-emotional accountability and reintegrative shame, which are often absent in conventional judicial processes. Policy should support the integration of formally monitored restorative justice circles as a primary diversion option for first-time juvenile offenders in township settings. Further training for community facilitators is required to ensure procedural fidelity and cultural appropriateness. restorative justice, juvenile recidivism, peacemaking circles, township communities, qualitative phenomenology This study provides novel empirical evidence on the specific socio-emotional mechanisms—particularly reintegrative shame and symbolic reparation—through which circle processes influence desistance, offering a new framework for community-led juvenile justice policy in an African urban context.

**Keywords:** *Restorative justice, Recidivism, Juvenile offenders, Townships, South Africa, Qualitative research, Peacemaking circles*

### Article Highlights

- Study explores lived experiences of 24 first-time juvenile offenders in Cape Town's restorative justice circles.
- Identifies community accountability and symbolic reparation as transformative mechanisms for desistance.
- Finds reintegrative shame within a supportive framework disrupts pathways to reoffending.
- Argues for policy integration of formally monitored circles as primary diversion in township settings.

### Policy Implication

Supports integration of formally monitored restorative justice circles as a primary diversion option for first-time juvenile offenders in township communities, requiring further facilitator training.

*Provides novel evidence on the socio-emotional mechanisms of circle processes in an African urban context.*



## ABSTRACT-ONLY PUBLICATION

This is an abstract-only publication. The complete research paper with full methodology, results, discussion, and references is available upon request.

## REQUEST FULL PAPER

 **Email:** [info@parj.africa](mailto:info@parj.africa)

Request your copy of the full paper today!

## SUBMIT YOUR RESEARCH

**Are you a researcher in Africa? We welcome your submissions!**

Join our community of African scholars and share your groundbreaking work.

 **Submit at:** [app.parj.africa](http://app.parj.africa)



Scan to visit [app.parj.africa](http://app.parj.africa)

### **Open Access Scholarship from PARJ**

Empowering African Research | Advancing Global Knowledge