



Reconstructing Restorative Sentencing Theory under Indonesia's 2023 Criminal Code: A Normative Study of Minor Offences

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ABSTRACT

The enactment of Law Number 1 of 2023 concerning the Criminal Code (Criminal Code 2023) marks a change in the criminal paradigm in Indonesia from a retributive approach to a more restorative approach. Although the purpose of punishment in the 2023 Criminal Code has accommodated the values of restorative justice, its regulation has not yet established a comprehensive normative framework for the settlement of misdemeanor crimes. This research aims to analyze the normative construction of restorative justice in the 2023 Criminal Code and reconstruct the theory of restorative criminalization for minor crimes. This research uses normative legal research methods with a legislative approach, a conceptual approach, and a comparative approach. Legal materials are analyzed qualitatively using prescriptive methods. The results of the study show that the restorative justice arrangements in the 2023 Criminal Code are still philosophical and have not comprehensively regulated the scope, mechanism, and legal consequences of restorative settlement, so that its implementation still depends on sectoral regulations and the discretion of law enforcement officials. As a conceptual contribution, this study offers a Restorative Criminal Theory Reconstruction Model that is built on five main elements, namely victim restoration, offender accountability, community participation, proportionality sentencing, and social reintegration. The model places restorative justice as a criminal paradigm for minor crimes so that it is expected to be a conceptual basis for improving criminal policies in the 2023 Criminal Code that better guarantees legal certainty, substantive justice, and legal utility.

INTRODUCTION

The reform of the criminal law in Indonesia through Law Number 1 of 2023 concerning the Criminal Code (Criminal Code 2023) marks a fundamental change in the orientation of national criminal policy. If the previous Criminal Code focused more on *the retributive justice* paradigm which views crime as an instrument of retribution for unlawful acts, the 2023 Criminal Code introduces a more humane approach by placing a balance between community protection, victim interests, perpetrator development, and the restoration of social relations as the goal of criminalization. This shift is reflected in the formulation of penal goals that are no longer solely oriented towards punishment, but also prioritize conflict resolution, balance restore, and the creation of peace in society (Kasvarof, 2026).

This change in orientation shows the strengthening influence of the concept of *restorative justice* in the development of modern criminal law. In contrast to the retributive approach that places the state as the main party in law enforcement, *restorative justice* views criminal acts as social conflicts that cause losses to victims, perpetrators, and the community, so that the resolution must be directed at restoring relationships that have been disrupted by criminal acts. In this perspective, the success of the criminal justice system is not only measured by the imposition of a crime, but also by the ability of the legal system to recover the victim's losses, foster the responsibility of the perpetrator, and restore social harmony. These developments are in line with the international trend to integrate restorative approaches as part of a more substantive justice and conflict resolution reform reform system (Sumartini Dewi, 2026).

The urgency of implementing the restorative paradigm is increasingly evident in the handling of minor crimes. The characteristics of minor offenses, which generally cause limited losses, do not pose a serious threat to public safety, and still allow for peace, make conventional sentencing approaches often disproportionate to the goal of legal protection to be achieved. In many cases, criminalization actually produces a greater social impact than the benefits obtained, such as stigmatization of perpetrators, disruption of social relations, increased burden on correctional institutions, and the victim's interests are not met to obtain real recovery. This condition shows that the settlement of minor crimes requires an approach that not only focuses on formal legality, but also considers proportionality, benefits, and remedies for all affected parties (Thomas Procter-Legg, Jonathan Hobson, 2024).

Although the 2023 Criminal Code has adopted penal objectives that reflect *restorative justice values*, the regulation has not fully reconstructed restorative criminal theory comprehensively, especially for misdemeanors. The existing regulations still emphasize the general purpose of criminalization rather than building a normative framework that integrates victim recovery, perpetrator accountability, community participation, and restorative settlement mechanisms as the main basis for criminal imposition. As a result, the implementation of *restorative justice* is still highly dependent on sectoral policies regulated through Police Regulations, Prosecutor's Regulations, and Supreme Court Regulations, so it has not been fully integrated in the penal system built by the 2023 Criminal

Code. This condition has the potential to cause policy fragmentation, uniform implementation, and legal uncertainty in the settlement of minor crimes.

Previous research has generally focused on the implementation of *restorative justice* by the police, prosecutor's office, or courts, as well as the effectiveness of resolving cases through peaceful mechanisms. Some other studies examine the suitability of *restorative justice policies* with the principles of legal certainty or protection of victims' rights. However, there is still very limited research that specifically examines how the criminal theory in the 2023 Criminal Code needs to be reconstructed to truly reflect the *restorative justice* paradigm, especially in handling minor crimes. In other words, the existing literature discusses more aspects of policy implementation than reconstructing the theoretical basis of criminalization that is the basis for the formation of norms in the 2023 Criminal Code.

Based on these gaps, this study offers a model for the reconstruction of the theory of restorative punishment for minor crimes in the 2023 Criminal Code. The reconstruction is built on five main pillars, namely victim restoration, offender accountability, community participation, proportional sentencing, and social reintegration. This model places criminality as an instrument of conflict recovery and resolution, not solely as a means of state retribution against the perpetrators. Thus, the reconstruction offered is expected to be able to strengthen the consistency between the penal goals in the 2023 Criminal Code and the principles of *restorative justice* that have developed in modern criminal law (William R. Wood, 2024).

This study aims to analyze the construction of the theory of punishment for minor crimes in the 2023 Criminal Code and formulate a reconstruction model of restorative criminal theory that is more responsive to the development of modern criminal law. Theoretically, this research is expected to contribute to the development of a criminal theory that integrates legal certainty, substantive justice, and legal utility. Practically, the results of this study are expected to be recommendations for lawmakers and law enforcement officials in improving criminal policies for minor crimes so that they better reflect the principles of restorative justice and the needs of contemporary society.

THEORETICAL REVIEW

Restorative Justice Theory

Restorative Justice *theory* developed as a critique of the retributive criminal paradigm that for centuries dominated the criminal justice system. In the retributive paradigm, criminal acts are seen as violations against the state, so the legal response is oriented towards inflicting suffering on the perpetrator through a crime that is proportional to his fault. This approach is considered not to be fully able to resolve social conflicts because it often ignores the interests of victims, recovery of losses, and social relationships damaged by criminal acts (Gade, 2021).

Howard Zehr, known as a pioneer of *restorative justice*, argued that criminal acts are inherently crimes against human beings and social relations, not simply violations against the state. Therefore, the settlement of criminal cases should be directed to restoration through the involvement of victims, perpetrators, and the

community in the conflict resolution process. In this perspective, the success of the criminal justice system is not measured by the severity of the crimes imposed, but by the extent to which the legal process is able to recover the victim's losses, encourage the perpetrator to take responsibility for his actions, and restore social harmony.

John Braithwaite then developed the concept through the theory of *reintegrative shaming*, which emphasizes that perpetrators must be held accountable without losing the opportunity to be accepted back into society. According to Braithwaite, a punishment-oriented sentencing process has the potential to reinforce social stigma and increase the risk of recidivism. Instead, a settlement that emphasizes responsibility, apology, compensation to victims, and social reintegration will be more effective in preventing the recurrence of criminal acts.

In the context of the 2023 Criminal Code, *the theory of Restorative Justice* is the basis for assessing whether the formulated criminal objectives have truly accommodated the principles of victim recovery, perpetrator accountability, community participation, and the restoration of social balance. This theory is also the conceptual foundation in formulating the reconstruction of the theory of punishment for minor crimes so that it is no longer solely oriented towards retribution, but on a more just, proportional, and sustainable resolution of conflicts.

Responsive Legal Theory

Responsive Legal Theory was developed by Philippe Nonet and Philip Selznick as a critique of legal models that are both repressive and autonomous. According to them, the development of the law moves from *repressive law*, to *autonomous law*, to achieving *responsive law*. At the responsive legal stage, law is no longer understood simply as a set of rules that must be applied mechanically, but as an instrument that is able to answer the needs of society, realize substantive justice, and solve social problems effectively (H. Lawrence Bond, 2012).

Nonet and Selznick emphasized that responsive law must have the ability to adapt to changes in social values without losing its legal certainty. Thus, the law should not only be oriented towards compliance with formal procedures, but must also pay attention to the social goals to be achieved through the application of the law. In the context of criminal law, the orientation requires that punishment not only be an instrument of state retribution, but also a means of conflict resolution, victim protection, rehabilitation of perpetrators, and the restoration of social relations.

The responsive legal approach has strong relevance to the development of *restorative justice*. Both of them place the law as a *problem-solving instrument* that is oriented to the needs of the community. Therefore, the application of *restorative justice* to minor crimes is a concrete form of criminal law transformation towards a legal system that is more responsive to the community's sense of justice.

In this study, responsive legal theory is used to analyze whether the construction of criminality in the 2023 Criminal Code has been able to

accommodate the development of public needs for a more humane resolution of criminal cases. In addition, this theory is the normative basis for reconstructing restorative criminal theory to be more adaptive to social dynamics, while still ensuring legal certainty and protection of the rights of victims and perpetrators.

METHODOLOGY

This research is a normative legal research that places law as a system of norms to be systematically analyzed through relevant laws and regulations, doctrines, legal principles, and legal theories. The selection of this method is based on the focus of research aimed at examining the construction of criminal arrangements for minor crimes in Law Number 1 of 2023 concerning the Criminal Code (Criminal Code 2023) and formulating a reconstruction of *restorative justice-based* criminal theory. Therefore, the research is not directed to assess the practice of law enforcement by law enforcement officials, but to evaluate the consistency, adequacy, and coherence of legal norms that govern the criminalization of minor crimes by using the perspective of *restorative justice theory* and responsive legal theory as the basis of analysis (Terry Hutchinson, 2012).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Normative Construction of Restorative Justice in the 2023 Criminal Code for Misdemeanor Crimes

The establishment of Law Number 1 of 2023 concerning the Criminal Code (Criminal Code 2023) is an important milestone in Indonesia's criminal law reform that not only codifies national criminal provisions, but also changes the criminal paradigm from a repressive orientation to a more humanist approach. This shift is reflected in the purpose of punishment as formulated in Article 51 of the 2023 Criminal Code which emphasizes that punishment is directed to prevent the occurrence of criminal acts, socialize convicts through coaching, resolve conflicts arising from criminal acts, restore balance, and bring a sense of security and peace in society. The formulation shows that lawmakers have adopted values that are identical to the *restorative justice* paradigm, although the term is not explicitly formulated as a criminal case settlement system in the Criminal Code (DONI SURYA SAPUTRA, 2026).

Philosophically, this change in orientation shows that criminalization is no longer seen solely as an instrument of state retribution against perpetrators (*retributive punishment*), but as a conflict resolution mechanism that pays attention to the interests of victims, perpetrators, and society in a balanced manner. This concept is in line with Howard Zehr's view that the criminal act is a violation of people *and relationships*, so that the solution must be directed to the recovery of losses, recognition of the responsibility of the perpetrator, and reconciliation between the parties. Thus, the purpose of punishment in the 2023 Criminal Code conceptually shows a shift towards a more restorative criminal model compared to the previous Criminal Code.

The *restorative justice regulation* in the 2023 Criminal Code is still implicit and has not yet formed a complete legal construction. The 2023 Criminal Code does contain the purpose of punishment that reflects restorative values, but does not provide provisions regarding the definition of *restorative justice*, the scope of

criminal acts that can be resolved through this mechanism, its implementation procedures, the form of rehabilitation that must be given to the victim, and the parameters for the success of restorative settlement. As a result, the concept of *restorative justice* in the 2023 Criminal Code functions more as a philosophical basis for criminal justice than as a normative mechanism that has operational power in criminal justice practice (Muhammad Rifaid, Abdul Haris, M. Jasuli Ramadhan, 2025).

This condition shows that there is a gap between the purpose of the punishment and the available legal instruments. On the one hand, the 2023 Criminal Code requires conflict resolution and balance restoration as the purpose of criminalization. On the other hand, the mechanism to realize these goals is more regulated through sectoral regulations, such as the National Police Regulation of the Republic of Indonesia Number 8 of 2021 concerning the Handling of Crimes Based on Restorative Justice, the Prosecutor's Regulation of the Republic of Indonesia Number 15 of 2020 concerning the Termination of Prosecutions Based on Restorative Justice, and Supreme Court Regulation Number 2 of 2012 concerning the adjustment of the limits of minor crimes. The fragmentation of these regulations causes the implementation of *restorative justice* to depend on the authority of law enforcement institutions, not on the penal system built in an integrated manner in the 2023 Criminal Code (Dheny Wahyudhi, Herlambang, 2025).

These problems become more significant in the settlement of minor crimes. The characteristics of misdemeanors basically have a relatively limited level of error and social impact, so settlement through conventional punishment is often not proportionate to the goal of legal protection to be achieved. In many circumstances, the imposition of prison sentences actually causes negative consequences in the form of stigmatization of perpetrators, increased burden on correctional institutions, disruption of social relations, and unmet needs of victims to obtain effective recovery. Therefore, *the restorative justice approach* becomes more relevant because it allows for the settlement of cases through dialogue, agreement of the parties, recovery of victims' losses, and social reintegration of perpetrators.

The 2023 Criminal Code has not provided normative criteria that expressly determine the parameters of minor crimes that deserve to be resolved through a restorative approach. The absence of indicators regarding the level of loss, the level of the perpetrator's fault, the victim's willingness to reconcile, the form of accountability of the perpetrator, and community involvement cause the implementation of *restorative justice* to still depend on the discretion of law enforcement officials. This condition has the potential to cause disparities in the application of the law because cases with similar characteristics can obtain different settlements depending on the policies of each institution or apparatus handling the case.

From the perspective of responsive legal theory, the situation shows that Indonesia's criminal law reform has only reached the stage of transformation of the goals of punishment, but has not fully reconstructed the normative structure necessary to realize these goals consistently. In other words, the 2023 Criminal Code has succeeded in shifting the philosophical orientation of criminalization

towards restorative justice, but has not built a normative framework that integrates victim recovery, perpetrator accountability, community participation, and social reintegration as the main elements of the criminal justice system. Therefore, it is necessary to reconstruct the theory of punishment that not only changes the purpose of punishment, but also builds a normative model that is able to make *restorative justice* an integral part of the national criminal law system (Fadilah Agustin, 2026).

The integration of *the restorative justice mechanism* in the normative construction of the 2023 Criminal Code, the regulation of misdemeanor offenses has also not shown a clear relationship between the purpose of the crime and the type of crime that can be imposed. Although the 2023 Criminal Code has expanded the criminal variations and placed imprisonment as *an ultimum remedium* in certain circumstances, the regulation has not explicitly directed judges to prioritize restorative resolution of misdemeanors that meet certain requirements. As a result, the orientation of punishment is still dominated by a legalistic approach centered on the imposition of sanctions, while the mechanism of victim recovery and conflict resolution remains positioned as a complementary instrument outside the penal system regulated in the Criminal Code. This condition shows that the paradigm transformation carried out by the 2023 Criminal Code is still at a philosophical level, not fully realized in the design of norms that are able to direct criminal justice practices consistently.

The development of criminal law in various countries, *restorative justice* arrangements are generally not only placed as an alternative to case settlement, but also as part of a criminal policy that is integrated with the criminal justice process. Various international instruments, including the *United Nations Basic Principles on the Use of Restorative Justice Programmes in Criminal Matters*, emphasize that restorative resolution should be based on the voluntary participation of the parties, protection of victims' rights, accountability of perpetrators, and oversight by competent authorities to ensure legal certainty and prevent abuse of authority. This perspective shows that the success of *restorative justice* does not only depend on the existence of discretionary space for law enforcement officials, but also requires a normative construction that expressly regulates the conditions, procedures, forms of agreements, and legal consequences of restorative settlement. Therefore, it is not enough to improve the 2023 Criminal Code through changes in the purpose of punishment, but must be followed by strengthening norms that integrate the principles of *restorative justice* into the criminal system for minor crimes as a whole.

Restorative Justice Theory Reconstruction Model

The change in the criminal paradigm in Law Number 1 of 2023 concerning the Criminal Code (Criminal Code 2023) shows a shift from the orientation of retaliation towards a more just conflict resolution. This shift is reflected in the goals of criminalization that emphasizes the prevention of crimes, the development of perpetrators, conflict resolution, the restoration of balance, and the creation of peace in society. However, these changes have not been followed by a reconstruction of criminal theory that comprehensively makes *restorative justice* the

main foundation in solving misdemeanor crimes. As a result, restorative values are still understood more as normative goals than as an operational framework that directs the criminal process (Syaifullah, 2026).

The modern criminal system can no longer be maintained solely based on a retributive theory that views crime as retribution for the mistakes of the perpetrator. The development of contemporary criminal law shows that the effectiveness of punishment is determined by its ability to resolve conflicts, recover victims' losses, and encourage perpetrators to take real responsibility for the consequences of their actions. Howard Zehr emphasized that criminal acts are violations against human beings and social relations so that their settlement must be oriented towards *restoration*, while John Braithwaite places the responsibility of perpetrators and social reintegration as the main goals of the criminal justice system. Thus, restorative criminal theory views crime not as the final goal, but as one of the instruments to achieve recovery and social peace.

From the perspective of legal theory, legal responsiveness must be able to adapt to the needs of a society that continues to evolve without ignoring the principle of legal certainty. Philippe Nonet and Philip Selznick explain that responsive law not only functions as an instrument of social control, but also as a means of *problem-solving law*. Therefore, criminal law reform through the 2023 Criminal Code should not stop at changing the purpose of the penalty, but also build a normative mechanism that allows for restorative resolution of cases while still ensuring the protection of victims' rights, the rights of perpetrators, and the interests of the community.

Based on an analysis of the provisions in Law Number 1 of 2023 concerning the Criminal Code (Criminal Code 2023), this study offers a Reconstruction Model of Restorative Crime Theory which consists of the following five main elements.

1. Victim Recovery
 - a. Placing the victim at the center of the case settlement process (victim-oriented justice).
 - b. Recover material and immaterial losses suffered by the victim.
 - c. Provide recognition for the victim's suffering through apology and restoration of their rights.
 - d. Ensure the achievement of a fair and recovery-oriented settlement.
2. Perpetrator Liability
 - a. Encourage the perpetrator to admit his mistake voluntarily.
 - b. Requiring the perpetrator to correct the consequences caused by the criminal act.
 - c. Placing accountability as a form of recovery, not solely suffering through criminality.
 - d. Forming the commitment of the perpetrator not to repeat his actions.
3. Community Participation
 - a. Involve the community as mediators, facilitators, or supervisors of the restorative process.
 - b. Encourage deliberative conflict resolution.
 - c. Strengthening social legitimacy towards the results of case settlement.

- d. Creating a social control mechanism for the implementation of restorative agreements.
- 4. Proportionality of Punishment
 - a. Making prison sentences the ultimate remedium.
 - b. Adjust the type and severity of the crime to the level of the perpetrator's offense.
 - c. Considering the loss of the victim, the peace of the parties, and the interests of the community.
 - d. Prioritizing the principles of utility, proportionality, and substantive justice in criminal sentencing.
- 5. Social Reintegration
 - a. Return the perpetrator as a responsible member of society.
 - b. Eliminate social stigma after the perpetrator fulfills his obligations.
 - c. Restoring social relations between victims, perpetrators, and the community.
 - d. Prevent the recurrence of criminal acts through a continuous reintegration process.

This reconstruction model shows that *restorative justice* should not be understood as an alternative mechanism outside the criminal system, but rather as a paradigm that shapes the entire process of resolving minor crimes. Therefore, the reconstruction of the theory of criminality in the 2023 Criminal Code needs to be directed at the formation of norms that explicitly integrate these five elements into criminal policy. The integration will strengthen consistency between the goals of the penalty, the protection of victims' rights, the accountability of perpetrators, and legal certainty in the Indonesian criminal justice system.

The model offered in this study makes a conceptual contribution to the development of criminal theory in Indonesia by shifting the orientation of punishment from state-centered punishment to restorative and community-oriented sentencing. These contributions not only enrich academic discourse on criminal law reform, but also offer a normative framework that can be used as a basis for improving penal policies for minor crimes in the future. Thus, the reconstruction of restorative criminal theory not only strengthens the achievement of the goals of punishment as formulated in the 2023 Criminal Code, but also creates a criminal law system that is more responsive, proportionate, and oriented towards substantive justice.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The 2023 Criminal Code has shifted the orientation of punishment from a retributive paradigm to a more restorative paradigm through penal goals that emphasize conflict resolution, balance restore, and community protection. However, the restorative justice arrangement is still philosophical and has not yet formed a comprehensive normative framework, especially in the settlement of minor crimes. As a result, the implementation of restorative justice still depends on sectoral regulations and the discretion of law enforcement officials, so it has the potential to cause inconsistency in practice.

The Restorative Crime Theory Reconstruction Model integrates five main elements, namely victim restoration, offender accountability, community participation, proportionality of sentencing, and social reintegration. This model places restorative justice as a criminal paradigm for minor crimes, so it is expected to be a conceptual basis for the improvement of criminal policies in the 2023 Criminal Code to better ensure legal certainty, substantive justice, and legal utility.

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