Journal of Policy and Development Studies

[ISSN 2958-1141]
Volume: 05 Issue: 01 | November-2026

JPDS

Victim Participation and Victim Satisfaction in Restorative Justice Programmes in Western Region, Kenya.

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Cite this article in APA

Mosis, S., & Oruta, E. M. (2026). Victim Participation and Victim Satisfaction in Restorative Justice Programs in Western Region, Kenya. *Journal of policy and development studies*, 5(1), 310-321. https://doi.org/10.51317/97qjt415

OPEN ACCESS

A publication of Editon Consortium Publishing (online)

Article history

Received: 2026-09-01
Accepted: 2026-10-05
Published: 2026-11-03

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Abstract

This study examined the relationship between victim participation, measured through engagement level, programme attendance and victim-offender interaction, and satisfaction among adult victims in Kakamega, Bungoma, Busia and Vihiga counties. Restorative justice is designed to guarantee victims a participatory role; however, local evidence on the relationship between victim involvement and satisfaction in community-led restorative processes in Western Kenya remains limited. Guided by Symbolic Interactionism, the study adopted a convergent parallel mixed-methods design involving a correlational survey, semi-structured interviews and focus group discussions. The target population and sampling frame comprised 18,284 adult victims of non-capital and non-sexual crimes documented in National Government Administration Officers' records between January 2022 and December 2024. Of the 400 selected victims, 349 completed questionnaires. Additionally, 24 National Government Administration Officers were interviewed, while 32 village elders participated in focus group discussions. Data collected were analysed using descriptive statistics, Pearson's correlation, simple linear regression, multiple regression and thematic analysis. Victim participation positively correlated with satisfaction ($r = .590$, $p < .001$), explaining 34.8 of its variances, $F(1, 347) = 184.932$, $p < .001$. However, its effect reduced to $\beta = .138$ after controlling for relationship, safeguards and inclusion. Qualitative findings showed that decision-making voice, attendance and sincere offender acknowledgement strengthened participation, while facilitator bias, tokenistic consultation and insincere apologies undermined satisfaction. The study concluded that participation enhanced satisfaction when substantive rather than merely formal. It recommends victim-controlled readiness decisions, facilitator neutrality training and systematic monitoring of participation quality to strengthen victim-centred restorative justice in Western Kenya.

Key terms: Restorative justice, victim-offender interaction, victim participation, victim satisfaction, Western Kenya.

INTRODUCTION

Restorative justice is intended to move victims from the margins of criminal justice to the centre of the process, yet taking part does not automatically make a victim satisfied. In Western Region, Kenya, National Government Administration Officers (NGAOs) and village elders handle eligible non-capital and non-sexual matters through informal restorative processes. The literature does not provide a correlation between meaningful say, the importance of scheduled meetings, the amount of time that is deemed to be suitable, and victim-offender face-to-face interaction vis-à-vis victim satisfaction. The existing literature shows that there is little localised evidence on whether, and under what conditions, victims' involvement in these processes is associated with how satisfied they are. The specific problem addressed by the study was therefore the lack of empirical evidence on how victims' level of engagement, programme attendance, and interaction with offenders relate to victim satisfaction in this setting.

Restorative justice brings together the victim, the offender, and others affected by an offence to recognise the harm, secure accountability, and agree on how the harm will be repaired (Omowon & Kunlere, 2024). Unlike adversarial justice, where the victim may remain mainly a witness in a state-led case, it gives the victim an active part in the process (Goldblum, 2023).

Victim participation is the active participation of the victim in the restorative justice process. The researcher operationalised victim participation into three dimensions, which include level of participation, wherein voice is made in the discussion and decision-making; program attendance, wherein attendance in the meetings is made until completion or without completion; and victim-offender interaction. According to Bolitho (2017), victim participation goes beyond mere attendance in the meeting, which includes also the discussion and the decision-making process.

Victim satisfaction, on the other hand, involves the perception of the process and the results of the process by the victim, such as the feelings of closure, acceptance and healing, open and positive communication, and consensual agreement. Satisfaction therefore does not equate to participation per se. Van Camp and Wemmers (2013) demonstrated that satisfaction is not only based on the existence of the programme, but more on how the process was conducted and also, most importantly, how the victim was treated.

Disappointments can arise when participation takes place. Victims might be rushed into the dialogue process before they are prepared (Wemmers et al., 2023); they might be consulted without having an effect on the results, or they might have to engage with offenders who apologise insincerely (Van Camp, 2017). In cases where there is a discrepancy in power, the dialogue process will reflect that power imbalance rather than fix it (Gavrielides, 2021).

The legal and policy environment in Kenya provides an environment where restorative justice can occur, as supported by Article 159 (2) of the Kenyan Constitution 2010 and Sessional Paper No. 4 of 2024 on ADR Policy. The Constitution of Kenya (Kenya, 2010) states that courts and tribunals should facilitate alternative methods of dispute resolution, and the National Alternative Dispute Resolution Policy provides a basis for dispute resolution (Office of the Attorney General and Department of Justice, 2024). Community-based restorative practice is also embedded in Kenya's tradition (Berggrund, 2017; Bwire, 2019). Nonetheless, recognition by law does not mean that the participation of the victims in these forums is effective or satisfying.

Given this situation, the study sought to explore the role of participation of victims in the process of restorative justice programmes and its association with satisfaction of the victims in Western Region, Kenya. Specifically, how does the participation of victims impact the victim's satisfaction? The article is an overview of existing literature on victim participation under restorative justice practices and victim satisfaction.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Conceptual Review of Victim Participation and Victim Satisfaction

Victim participation is a multidimensional practice rather than a single event. Goldblum (2023) described victim engagement as an active practice in which

victims are encouraged to share their needs and experiences and to take part in dialogue with offenders. Level of engagement concerns how far victims speak, are heard, and influence what is decided. Bolivar (2019) associated higher involvement with greater emotional benefit and satisfaction. Voice alone is not sufficient, however. Wemmers (2017) cautioned that genuine engagement allows victims to express their needs without being hampered, and that a one-size-fits-all approach ignores differences in what victims need.

The quality of engagement depends on preparation, readiness, and facilitation. Keenan (2018) argued that preparation builds victims' confidence, and Wemmers et al. (2023) argued that victims' readiness depends on their concerns being addressed beforehand, and warned against hurrying victims into restorative processes. Suzuki (2020) likewise made readiness central to how restorative conferencing works. Skilled facilitators are also needed to manage strong emotion and to prevent any party from dominating (Bolitho & Bruce, 2017).

Programme attendance is commonly read as an indicator of commitment to the process and of its perceived usefulness (Walsh et al., 2021), and it extends to the time invested and the completion of the programme (Umbreit, 2023). Yet absence does not always signal a lack of readiness: Holden (2021) noted that work, family obligations, and transport may keep participants away. Attendance is therefore a condition for dialogue rather than proof that meaningful dialogue occurred.

Victim-offender interaction involves communication that happens during the encounter. Nettleton & Strang (2018) studied face-to-face conferences as places where victims get the opportunity to express their feelings regarding the consequences of the harm and seek an apology from the offender. According to Quinney et al. (2024), those victims who felt they had the whole truth about the incident were willing to accept the apologies, which shows the importance of what offenders communicate. Similarly, Van Camp (2017) associated victims' willingness to participate in the process with their perception of offenders' participation being sincere. Sometimes direct physical contact may not be appropriate, as Peretó (2021) described the difficulties associated with face-to-face conferences in mediation.

Victim satisfaction is the outcome these dimensions are expected to influence. In a systematic review, Nascimento et al. (2023) found that restorative practices can support victims' psychological recovery while outcomes vary with the quality of implementation. Satisfaction should therefore be understood as shaped by how participation is delivered, not by its availability alone.

Theoretical Review

The study was guided by Symbolic Interactionism, which holds that people act towards things on the basis of the meanings those things have for them, that these meanings arise from social interaction, and that they are handled and modified through an interpretive process (Rusu, 2021). Applied to restorative justice, a victim's participation is not a neutral procedural step. It is an interaction through which the victim interprets whether the process recognises the harm and whether the offender understands it. Victims are more likely to engage where they see their involvement as relevant to healing and closure (Rusu, 2021).

Symbolic Interactionism explains the level of engagement that captures the meanings victims attach to having a voice under victim participation in restorative justice practices. Attendance captures how repeated interaction allows meanings to be revisited and developed under victim participation in restorative justice practices. Victim-offender interaction captures the symbolic exchange of apology and acknowledgement through which the meaning of the offence, and of the offender, is better understood under victim participation in restorative justice practices. The theory therefore explains that participation would be positively related to satisfaction, and that the quality of interaction is important under victim participation in restorative justice practices.

The theory also has limits. Its micro-level focus explains how victims experience participation but not the institutional conditions, such as impartial facilitation, that enable or constrain it, which procedural justice scholarship treats as central to fairness judgements (Vermunt & Steensma, 2016). The

study therefore used qualitative evidence to examine those conditions, while recognising that its cross-sectional design could establish association rather than causal direction.

Empirical Review and Knowledge Gap

Globally, evidence links restorative participation with victim benefits. Strang et al. (2013), in a systematic review of conferencing based on face-to-face meetings of offenders and victims, examined effects on victim satisfaction as well as offender recidivism, and Hansen and Umbreit (2018) reviewed four decades of victim-offender mediation research and practice. Bolitho (2017) showed that emotional change in restorative justice is produced not merely by attendance but by interactional processes within the encounter. These studies establish that participation matters, but they say less about how its separate dimensions relate to satisfaction than the current study seeks to establish.

Bolivar (2019) analysed victim restoration through mediation in a psychosocial, mixed-method study but did not operationalise victim participation as a discrete, measurable predictor of satisfaction. Peretó (2021) evaluated face-to-face meetings, participation, and communication in Spanish victim-offender mediation through a qualitative, case-based analysis that did not statistically test participation against satisfaction. Neither study was located in an African or Kenyan restorative justice context.

Within Africa, Murhula and Tolla (2021) found that restorative justice practices in South Africa could respond to victims' needs and improve their experience of justice, although, as far as this review could establish, it did not test participation dimensions against victim satisfaction. In Kenya, Bwire (2019) argued that African customary justice is restorative because it promotes accountability, reparation, and the full participation of affected community members. McConkie (2025) described Kenyan community processes as giving victims a platform to voice concerns, Wamaitha (2025) examined victim protection and its implications for restorative justice, and Kiogora (2025) reported that alternative justice processes in Isiolo County could support relationship restoration through community dialogue. These studies show the relevance of participatory community justice but not how engagement, attendance, and interaction relate to the satisfaction of individual victims.

The reviewed literature therefore revealed contextual and methodological gaps. Contextually, studies of participation were largely located in European or other formal-justice settings, and African and Kenyan studies did not test the three participation dimensions against victim satisfaction among adult users of NGAO- and elder-administered processes in the Western Region, which the study concentrated on. Methodologically, earlier work tended to treat participation as a single presence in the process or relied on qualitative accounts, leaving unclear whether the voice a victim is given translates into an agreement perceived as consensual and fair, which the present study concentrated on. The present study addressed these gaps through a convergent mixed-methods design.

METHODOLOGY

The research employed a convergent parallel mixed-methods approach, integratingnvergent parallel mixed-methods design, combining a correlational quantitative component with an exploratory qualitative component (Babbie, 2020; Salwa et al., 2025). Findings from both strands were analysed separately and integrated during interpretation. The research was carried out in the counties of Kakamega, Bungoma, Busia, and Vihiga, where NGAOs and village elders facilitate community processes for non-capital, non-sexual offences.

The target population comprised 18,284 adult victims recorded by National Government Administration Officers (NGAOs) between January 2022 and December 2024. Eligible victims were adults involved in restorative processes. Using Taro Yamane's formula, 400 victims were selected through county and year-of-registration stratification, followed by simple random sampling. Of these, 349 completed questionnaires. Purposive sampling selected 24 NGAOs and 32 village elders for interviews and four focus group discussions.

Data were collected between April and June 2026. Victims completed questionnaires containing twelve five-point Likert items, a satisfaction scale and open-ended questions. Interviews and discussions were conducted in local languages, audio-recorded with

consent, and supplemented with field notes. Instrument content was expert-reviewed and piloted with 40 victims in Kisumu County; the participation scale yielded Cronbach's alpha of .728. Principal component analysis was employed to evaluate construct validity. Quantitative data were analysed in SPSS version 31 using descriptive statistics, Pearson correlation and regression. Qualitative data underwent thematic analysis, and findings were integrated.

Ethical approval was obtained from Masinde Muliro University of Science and Technology, with a research permit from NACOSTI. Informed consent, confidentiality, anonymity and voluntary participation were maintained; trained assistants and counselling support helped protect participants.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Response Rate and Measurement Quality

A total of 400 questionnaires were distributed to the victims, out of which only 349 were returned for analysis, giving an effective response rate of 87.25 per cent. Out of the 51 non-returned questionnaires (12.75%), most were due to the relocation or withdrawal of those who initially agreed. The qualitative approach involved 24 National Government Administration Officers and 32 village elders.

The twelve participation items were suitable for component analysis, as shown in Table 1. Component 1 captured the relational quality of participation and was led by emotional and practical support that enables open communication (.941), quality time in the process (.918), direct conversation with the offender (.873), and a meaningful say in decisions (.864). Component 2 reflected outcome-related dimensions which were characterised by true recognition of harm (.874), closure being conditional on apology or agreement (.872), and completion of the programme (.706). Six items were found to load above .50 for both components. This makes sense since satisfaction is influenced by both process and outcome; however, it also indicates that participation is not a unidimensional construct.

Table 1: Measurement Quality of the Victim Participation Construct

Indicator	Result	Interpretation
Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin measure	.816	Good sampling adequacy
Bartlett's Test of Sphericity	Significant, $p < .001$	Items were sufficiently correlated
Components extracted	2 (varimax rotation)	Participation was multidimensional
Primary loading range	.560–.941	All items above .50
Items loading above .50 on both components	6 of 12	Process and outcome elements overlap
Usable questionnaires	349/400 (87.25%)	Adequate response rate
Pilot Cronbach's alpha (n = 40)	.728	Acceptable for pilot refinement only

Source: Field Data (2026).

The pilot alpha of .728 came from the pilot sample (n = 40). The retained main-study output did not contain a recomputed alpha for the final sample (n = 349), so none is inferred here, and the measurement results are interpreted as supporting construct validity rather than demonstrating final-sample internal consistency.

Table 2 summarises the twelve participation statements. Means ranged from 4.37 to 4.77 and averaged about 4.6, with agreement ranging from 84.5 per cent to 100 per cent. Victims therefore endorsed participation strongly, and more strongly where it produced acknowledgement and shaped the agreement than where it described presence alone.

Table 2: Victims' Ratings of Victim Participation (N = 349)

Victim participation statement	Agreement (%)	Mean	SD
Having a meaningful say in the decisions leads to an outcome that is fair and consensual	84.5	4.37	1.074
A final agreement reflecting personal needs and input, rather than others' expectations, promotes healing	96.3	4.63	0.595
Attending scheduled meetings (cumulative process) is crucial to personal acceptance of what happened	94.8	4.58	0.752
Healing depends more on the content and dialogue of meetings than on consistent attendance	97.4	4.64	0.612
Successfully completing the entire programme is essential for personal healing	96.3	4.62	0.636
Closure depends more on the content of the final agreement and dialogue than on formally finishing the programme	97.1	4.65	0.534
The amount of quality time spent in the process promotes a sense of closure	89.4	4.50	0.880
Direct conversation with the offender is important to promote healing	90.5	4.51	0.873
Healing is promoted most by hearing a sincere acknowledgment of the harm, not just talking to the offender	100.0	4.77	0.419
Closure depended more on the apology or consensual agreement	98.6	4.72	0.480
Harm is truly addressed when personal healing is achieved, not just when the process ends	98.6	4.69	0.539
With emotional and practical support, the victim gains confidence to communicate openly with the offender	87.7	4.47	0.975

Source: Field Data (2026).

Note. Agreement combines "strongly agree" and "agree" responses on a five-point Likert scale and was computed from response counts.

Sincere acknowledgement of harm recorded the highest mean (M = 4.77, SD = 0.419) and was the only item with no disagreement. Closure depending on apology or a consensual agreement (M = 4.72) and harm being addressed only when personal healing is achieved (M = 4.69) followed. Attending scheduled meetings (M = 4.58) was rated slightly below the statement that healing depends more on the content of meetings than on attendance (M = 4.64). The largest dissent lay on voice in decisions (15.2% disagreed) and on support enabling open communication (10.9% disagreed or strongly disagreed), and these minorities are analytically more informative than the high means.

The consistency of the very high scores deserves some restraint. The items asked the victims to consider what helped bring about their healing or closure. They did not check whether all of these components were provided in all cases, so the scores close to the ceiling could be due to normative endorsement in addition to personal experience. The volunteer sample, 12.75 per cent non-response rate, and the possibility of acquiescence might also have limited the range of the results.

Among the open-ended questions, 88 per cent of the victims felt that their participation has helped to enhance their satisfaction regarding the case handling process. One victim stated, "I feel like I am participating rather than being a victim" (Field Data, 2026). Among the 12 per cent who felt otherwise, there were insincere apologies, biasness, pressure for acceptance, and unfulfilled agreements. The themes that emerged from the qualitative study include voice

as a way of restoring control and dignity, attendance as credibility and not a solution, and sincerity as the essence of interaction.

Level of Engagement: Voice and Decision-Making

Officials and elders consistently linked involvement in decisions to healing and closure. An Assistant County Commissioner described the mechanism:

"Active participation in decision-making gives victims a voice and a sense of control which is often lost during the harm they experienced. It allows them to express their feelings, explain the impact of the offense, and contribute to shaping outcomes such as apologies, restitution." (Assistant County Commissioner [ACC-INT-01], personal communication, 27 April 2026).

A Chief added that inclusion accelerated recovery and changed the character of the outcome:

"When victims feel that they have been included in decision-making, they heal faster and achieve closure as that leads to a win-to-win situation." (Chief [CH-INT-01], personal communication, 16 April 2026).

These accounts explain a pattern in Table 2. Victims rated an agreement reflecting their own needs (M = 4.63, 96.3 per cent agreement) more highly than the general statement that a meaningful say leads to a fair and consensual outcome (M = 4.37, 84.5%). Engagement was valued when it shaped the outcome, not as an abstract right to be consulted, but rather in how engagement influenced the end result. This aligns with Symbolic Interactionism, as when the mediator tries to hear the viewpoint of the victim, the gesture can be interpreted by the victim as a sign of acknowledgement, while the imposition of decisions indicates the non-importance of the victim's viewpoint (Rusu, 2021).

The two strands diverged on the dissenting minority. Officials gave an almost uniformly affirmative account, but the 15.2 per cent of victims who disagreed were visible only in the survey and the open-ended responses. These victims reported pressure and bias, such as "I felt pressured to agree to terms I did not want. The facilitators seemed to favor the offender because they were related" (Field Data, 2026). Engagement therefore failed not through the absence of consultation but through consultation without ceded control, a risk that Wemmers (2017) and Gavrielides (2021) also describe where needs and power are not addressed.

Programme Attendance: Presence as Credibility

All informants agreed that regular attendance was associated with positive outcomes, but they described it as a means rather than an end. An Assistant County Commissioner tied attendance to the quality of engagement:

"Regular attendance of scheduled meetings by our administrative offices between the offender and the victims is a strong contributing factor to positive outcomes, especially when combined with genuine engagement between these two parties." (Assistant County Commissioner [ACC-INT-01], personal communication, 28 April 2026).

An Assistant Chief emphasised information, observing that positive outcomes were more likely because "the majority of the victims feel that they have not been shortchanged as they participate and get all the information" (Assistant Chief [AC-INT-02], personal communication, 14 April 2026). A village elder added a clarifying function:

"Attendance provides room for clarification on any matter that appears not clear or needs to be discussed further." (Village Elder FGD [VE-FGD-03], personal communication, 15 April 2026).

Three functions can be distinguished: attendance informs victims, signals commitment, and creates repeated opportunities to clarify. This coincides with the hierarchy in the survey, where the content of dialogue (M = 4.64) topped the list, followed by attendance (M = 4.58). The quality-time indicator was one of those with the largest standard deviations (SD = 0.880), showing that there were differences among victims on how much time was worth spending, and that one victim viewed an ineffective meeting as "a waste of time" (Field Data, 2026). Attendance should be viewed as a credibility indicator that facilitates dialogue, and mere attendance reports are not a sufficient indicator of participation.

Victim-Offender Interaction and Sincere Acknowledgement

Interaction was the construct on which the strands converged most strongly. All 349 victims agreed that healing depends not merely on talking to the offender

but on hearing sincere acknowledgement of harm. The general statement on direct conversation was less unanimous (M = 4.51; 8.0% disagreed). Officials and victims explained why. An Assistant County Commissioner endorsed direct contact but warned of its limits:

"Nevertheless, the process must be handled properly since some of the victims are often not ready to face the offender." (Assistant County Commissioner [ACC-INT-01], personal communication, 20 April 2026).

Victims' accounts showed what separated acknowledgement they accepted from acknowledgement they rejected. One contrasted an offender who added, "but she provoked me" with another who said, "I was wrong. There is no excuse" (Field Data, 2026). Another described an offender who named the specific harm as someone who "knew what he did" (Field Data, 2026), whereas a repeated, generic apology felt rehearsed. A village elder identified a related need: that unanswered questions be addressed:

"Lots of unanswered questions that the victims have are answered by the offender and in most cases help to reach a solution that is accepted by the victim and therefore promotes healing." (Village Elder FGD [VE-FGD-03], personal communication, 15 April 2026).

These findings fit Symbolic Interactionism because the meaning of an apology is constructed through the clarity of its specificity and the lack of qualifiers, but not in terms of its utterance. This also resonates with the findings of Quinney et al. (2024), in which victims felt that they had known everything there was to know and they accepted apologies, and with Van Camp (2017), in which participation was connected with perception of the offenders' genuineness. Readiness still proved to be crucial, as asserted by Suzuki (2020), so one cannot assume that personal meetings are applicable for all victims, and there must be alternative ways of apologising, such as those suggested by Marder and Rossner (2021). Family and community support was also a double-edged sword: an elder participating in a focus group said that if a victim forgives due to pressure from the family, this does not mean real recovery (VE-FGD-03).

Relationship between Victim Participation and Victim Satisfaction

A simple linear regression model was employed to examine the relationship between the composite victim participation score as the independent variable and victim satisfaction as the dependent variable. The results are presented in Table 3.

Table 3: Regression of Victim Participation on Victim Satisfaction (N = 349)

Statistic	Value	Interpretation
Pearson R	.590	Moderate-to-strong positive relationship
R^2 / Adjusted R^2	.348 / .346	34.8% of satisfaction variance explained
Standard error of estimate	6.033	Average prediction error
ANOVA	F (1, 347) = 184.932, p < .001	Regression model was significant
Unstandardised coefficient	B = .470, SE = .035	Positive change in satisfaction
Standardised coefficient	β = .590, t = 13.599, p < .001	Significant predictor
Constant	B = 6.653, SE = .878, p < .001	Baseline satisfaction was significant

Source: Field Data (2026).

Victim participation had a moderate-to-strong positive relationship with victim satisfaction (r = .590, p < .001) and explained 34.8 per cent of its variance (R^2 = .348), F (1, 347) = 184.932, p < .001. Higher participation scores were associated with higher satisfaction (B = .470, SE = .035; β = .590, t = 13.599, p < .001). The expectation drawn from Symbolic Interactionism, that participation would be positively related to satisfaction, was therefore supported. Because the design was cross-sectional, this is an association and not proof of causation.

The secondary multiple regression qualified this result. With victim participation, pre-existing victim-offender relationship, procedural safeguards, and community inclusion entered together, the model explained 53.5 per cent of the variance in satisfaction (R^2 = .535, adjusted R^2 = .529), F (4, 344) = 98.756, p < .001.

Participation remained significant (B = .110, β = .138, t = 2.578, p = .010) but its standardised effect fell from .590 to .138, and it was smaller than that of the pre-existing relationship (β = .293) and procedural safeguards (β = .267) and similar to that of community inclusion (β = .142). Participation correlated with these predictors (r = .609 to .659), so much of its apparent effect in the simple model is shared with relational history, safeguards, and community support.

Integrated Interpretation and Contribution

The convergences came in three ways. First, the preference for agreements that were made based on personal needs rather than consultations in general could be attributed to the officials because of the relationship between consultation and influence over outcomes. Second, the ordering of dialogue content above attendance could be validated by the informants, who viewed attendance as being instrumental. Third, unanimous survey responses agreed that sincerity of acknowledgement was necessary.

The quantitative and qualitative data also reinforced each other. The dissent that appeared in the survey was generally invisible to the administrators, as they assess participation from the perspective of the facilitator, while the narratives of the victims provided the means of kinship bias and subtle pressure. The less unanimous evaluation of the direct conversation does not necessarily mean refusal to communicate, but it indicates the willingness and seriousness of the encounter. The interpretation that can be derived from integrating these strands together is that participation was highly valued and perceived as being linked to satisfaction; however, its influence was conditional.

The paper provides insights by examining participation on three dimensions against victim satisfaction in community-managed justice processes in Western Kenya, as well as where a combination score fails to reveal the context within which participation works or fails. In practice, a restorative process cannot be said to be successful simply because meetings have taken place and agreement reached; the victim has to be prepared, listened to, and acknowledged.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Conclusion: The study established a positive and significant correlation between victim participation and satisfaction in Western Region, Kenya (r = .590; R^2 = .348), supporting Symbolic Interactionism. Victims valued decision-making, attendance, and interaction; however, participation's significance depended on process content. Decision-making mattered most when it influenced outcomes, attendance signalled commitment and encouraged dialogue rather than healing, while interaction was meaningful through acknowledgement.

Participation's unique contribution declined after controlling for relationships, safeguards, and community inclusion (β = .138), indicating its complementary role. Thus, participation is necessary but conditional for satisfaction. Restorative justice becomes victim-centred when consultation is meaningful, readiness respected, and acknowledgement genuine.

Recommendations: The National Council on the Administration of Justice and the Office of the Attorney General and Department of Justice should establish minimum participation guidelines for community-based restorative justice, ensuring victims retain the final decision on meeting offenders and receive alternatives where necessary.

NGAOs and facilitators should conduct readiness and conflict-of-interest assessments before meetings. Facilitators with stakeholder relationships should withdraw. Training should strengthen neutrality and pressure management, addressing frustrations identified qualitatively.

Facilitators should provide uninterrupted speaking opportunities, incorporate victims' grievances into agreements, and involve them in drafting terms rather than imposing predetermined conditions.

Offender readiness should be assessed, with preparation for specific acknowledgement and responses to victims' questions, since generic or qualified apologies reduce satisfaction.

Monitoring should measure participation rates, agreement completion, and the effectiveness of victims' voices being heard and understood. Future longitudinal studies should examine whether these relationships persist over time.

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