

## Effect of transitional or restorative justice & Justice system support and reform on Food Security and Health security

Transitional and restorative justice initiatives can influence food and health security by fostering social cohesion and reintegrating marginalized groups. However, these interventions often reactivate trauma, causing a harmful effect on affected communities without integrated mental health support.

Geographic Location: Sub Saharan Africa, East Asia & Pacific, Latin America & Caribbean, Global

Effect: Harmful effect ( $g = -0.049$ )

Confidence in study findings: Low confidence (3 studies with 8 effect sizes)

### Short Summary:

The cell shows that transitional and restorative justice programs can improve social cohesion but have harmful effects on food and health security by increasing psychological distress. Truth-telling forums in Sierra Leone and Gacaca courts in Rwanda facilitated reconciliation but also led to re-traumatization, PTSD, anxiety, and depression for some participants.

### Long Summary

#### *The Intervention:*

These interventions bring together victims and perpetrators to address past conflict, often through Truth and Reconciliation Commissions, restorative justice programs, and justice system reforms. They aim to acknowledge past harms, repair relationships, and strengthen rule of law through improved courts, legal frameworks, and access to justice.

#### *How the Intervention is expected to work:*

The success of reconciliation interventions depends on collaboration among governments, NGOs, community and religious leaders, and mental health professionals. Programs foster trust, reconciliation, and social cohesion. However, revisiting past trauma can exacerbate psychological distress, which can negatively impact health outcomes and household stability.

#### *The Evidence Base:*

The cell contains 7 studies, 1 RCTs, three were non-experimental studies, 1 ongoing protocol, 1 qualitative design and finally a systematic review.

The primary studies are from Rwanda (3 studies), Sierra Leone (2 studies), Colombia (1 study) this protocol by Vargas (2018) is still an on-going study, Solomon Islands and Timor-Leste (1 qualitative study) and finally the systematic review with a Global focus.

#### *Evidence findings:*

Justice interventions improve social cohesion and community trust but generate harmful psychological effects that undermine food and health security. The limited and low-quality evidence suggests that these programs require integrated mental health support to be safe and effective.

*The review evidence:*

While the review does not directly address food security its findings suggest that justice system reforms, particularly those that enhance victim participation, can have broader social implications. Transitional and restorative justice mechanisms, often implemented in post-conflict or post-atrocity settings, aim to address systemic injustices, rebuild trust in institutions, and promote stability. These factors can indirectly contribute to food security by fostering social cohesion, reducing violence, and enabling economic recovery, all of which are essential for stable food production and distribution systems. Additionally, health security can be improved when justice reforms ensure accountability for crimes, reduce trauma and victimisation, and provide legal avenues for redress, thus enhancing psychological well-being and access to healthcare services. This study is rated low confidence.

*The impact evaluation evidence:*

**Bazuin (2013):** The Bazuin study explores the role of reconciliation efforts in post-conflict Rwanda, with particular attention to food security and health security. The study highlights how religious and community-based interventions influence access to basic needs, including food and healthcare, by reintegrating ex-prisoners and fostering community cohesion. In terms of food security, the study examines faith-based community programs that provide food aid and agricultural support to vulnerable populations. These initiatives often aim to stabilise livelihoods by assisting ex-prisoners and genocide survivors in securing land access, engaging in communal farming, and receiving agricultural inputs. Additionally, religious institutions and NGOs play a role in addressing economic disparities by promoting self-sufficiency through vocational training. Regarding health security, the study centers trauma healing programs and mental health support. Many post-conflict interventions, including faith-based and NGO-led counseling services, aim to address PTSD, depression, and anxiety among genocide survivors. These initiatives often integrate traditional healing practices, group therapy, and radio-based mental health campaigns to reach a broader population. Additionally, religious organisations contribute to public health efforts, providing medical aid, maternal health programs, and HIV awareness campaigns. This study is low confidence due to non-experimental design and low description of outcomes and interventions.

**Caparos (2020):** The Caparos study primarily evaluates the psychological impact of the Gacaca tribunals in Rwanda but does not explicitly focus on food security. However, it indirectly relates to health security by analysing the mental health outcomes of individuals exposed to transitional justice. The study assesses the impact of different levels of participation in the Gacaca courts—whether individuals attended as witnesses, testifiers, or abstained—on PTSD, depression, and attitudes toward reconciliation. For health security, the study provides valuable insights into mental health challenges faced by survivors, including the risk of re-traumatisation for those who testified. The findings suggest that while attending trials without testifying was associated with lower PTSD and depression symptoms, testifying often led to higher distress, indicating a

need for psychological support mechanisms alongside justice programs. This study is low confidence due to non-experimental design and no mention of power calculations.

**Cilliers (2018):** This study mentions food security and health security within the context of post-conflict Sierra Leone by evaluating the Fambul Tok reconciliation initiative. While food security is not a primary outcome, the study indirectly addresses it through communal farming projects introduced as part of the reconciliation process. These farms were established to promote economic cooperation and improve local agricultural productivity, but the study found no significant long-term impact on food security outcomes. Regarding health security, the study primarily examines mental health impacts associated with truth-telling and community reconciliation efforts. While the Fambul Tok program fostered forgiveness and social cohesion, it also led to increased psychological distress, including higher rates of PTSD, anxiety, and depression. This suggests that while reconciliation initiatives can strengthen community bonds, they can also reopen traumatic memories, highlighting the need for integrated mental health support within such programs. This study is rated high confidence.

**Rime (2012):** This study demonstrates that transitional and restorative justice mechanisms, such as the Gacaca tribunals, trigger powerful psychosocial effects by reactivating collective emotions and reshaping group identities. The study notes that "when a common emotional event is recalled collectively, any expression of emotion by individual participants vividly elicits analogous feelings in the people around them", leading to a reciprocal stimulation that reinforces a shared sense of community despite the painful memories. This process, rooted in Durkheim's model of collective rituals, not only "propagates similar emotional feelings" but also transforms individual identities by diminishing the salience of the personal self in favor of a stronger collective identity. Consequently, while these justice mechanisms reopen wounds through the reactivation of negative emotions, they also pave the way for reconciliation by enabling an "enhanced self-confidence and a renewed faith in life" among participants. This study is rated low confidence due to its non-experimental design and partial description of the interventions. Additionally, effect sizes could not be extracted from this study due to insufficient data throughout the study.

#### *Confidence Assessment:*

Overall Low: The cell is rated low confidence due to the limited number of studies and the generally low quality of the evidence.

#### **Other outcomes in the study:**

Human security / Political security

Human security / Economic security

Community and state governance / Government Performance

#### *Link to review summaries:*

Holder (2023)