

Law Students' Perceptions of Victims' Rights Protection in the Implementation of Restorative Justice under Law Number 20 of 2025 on the Indonesian Criminal Procedure Code

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Abstract

Restorative justice has become part of Indonesia's criminal procedure reform through Law Number 20 of 2025 concerning the Indonesian Criminal Procedure Code. This study examined law students' understanding of victims' rights protection and their perceptions of the distinction between voluntary reconciliation and pressured settlement in restorative justice proceedings. Using a descriptive qualitative approach, the study involved two law students from universities in Malang selected through purposive sampling. Data were collected through interviews and analysed through data reduction, data display, thematic categorisation, and conclusion drawing. The findings showed that both participants viewed restorative justice as a process that should prioritise victim recovery, offender accountability, and the restoration of social relationships. Victims were regarded as active rights-holders entitled to information, meaningful participation, legal assistance, protection from intimidation, and material and non-material recovery. Both participants rejected the view that a signed peace agreement automatically proves voluntary consent. Voluntary reconciliation was associated with informed and freely given consent, whereas pressured settlement involved direct threats and indirect influences, including family persuasion, community expectations, economic vulnerability, institutional pressure, emotional exhaustion, and unequal social status. The study concludes that restorative justice should be assessed by whether victims are genuinely heard, protected, restored, and able to decide independently.

1. Introduction

The development of Indonesia's criminal justice system reflects a gradual transition from a predominantly retributive and offender-oriented model toward a more balanced approach that recognises human rights, victims' interests, offender accountability, and the restoration of social relationships. For many years, criminal proceedings primarily focused on determining the offender's guilt and imposing punishment, while victims were often positioned mainly as witnesses and had limited participation in decisions concerning the resolution of their cases (John et al., 2025). Legal reforms have progressively challenged this approach by introducing restorative justice, which seeks to involve victims, offenders, their families, and relevant community members in resolving the consequences of criminal conduct (Jzani, 2025). Restorative justice was formally incorporated into Indonesia's juvenile justice system through Law Number 11 of 2012 and was subsequently strengthened through institutional policies and Supreme Court Regulation Number 1 of 2024. The broader reform of national criminal law continued through Law Number 1 of 2023 concerning the Indonesian Criminal Code and Law Number 20 of 2025 concerning the Indonesian Criminal Procedure Code, which replaced colonial-era criminal-law frameworks and strengthened the orientation of criminal proceedings toward substantive justice, legal protection, and the interests of victims (Dona et al., 2025). This development demonstrates that contemporary criminal justice is expected not only to punish offenders but also to repair harm, protect victims' dignity and rights, and ensure that reconciliation occurs voluntarily, fairly, and without coercion.

The enactment of Law Number 20 of 2025 concerning the Indonesian Criminal Procedure Code marked a significant milestone in the reform of Indonesia's criminal justice system. The law was enacted on 17 December 2025 and entered into force on 2 January 2026, replacing Law Number 8 of 1981, which was considered no longer fully responsive to developments in the national legal system, social conditions,

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human rights standards, and information technology. The new Criminal Procedure Code introduces several important reforms, including the strengthening of the rights of suspects, defendants, convicted persons, witnesses, victims, and persons with disabilities; the improvement of coordination among criminal justice institutions; the strengthening of pretrial mechanisms and the role of advocates; and the regulation of restitution, compensation, rehabilitation, and restorative justice (Fairclough et al., 2023; Huang and Shih, 2024). These reforms demonstrate an effort to develop a criminal procedure system that is more accountable, transparent, humane, and consistent with due process of law (Irvita and Asriani, 2025). More importantly, the explicit recognition of restorative justice provides a legal foundation for resolving certain criminal cases through dialogue, accountability, reparation, and the restoration of relationships. Nevertheless, its implementation must ensure that reconciliation does not merely serve as a means of terminating a case, but genuinely protects victims' rights, guarantees their voluntary participation, and prevents intimidation, coercion, or other forms of pressure during the settlement process.

The position of victims in criminal proceedings has gradually developed from that of passive witnesses into rights-bearing participants whose interests must be recognised throughout the criminal justice process. Traditionally, criminal proceedings have concentrated primarily on establishing the offender's guilt and determining an appropriate punishment, while victims have often been treated mainly as sources of evidence (Yunara et al., 2024). Such an approach may overlook the physical, psychological, social, and economic harm experienced by victims as a direct consequence of criminal conduct (Nascimento et al., 2023; Satchell et al., 2023). Law Number 20 of 2025 concerning the Indonesian Criminal Procedure Code seeks to strengthen the legal position of victims by recognising victim protection as an essential component of criminal procedure and by regulating mechanisms such as restorative justice, restitution, compensation, and rehabilitation. Within a restorative justice process, victims should have the right to receive adequate information, express their experiences and needs, participate meaningfully in decision-making, obtain protection from intimidation or retaliation, and pursue appropriate reparation and recovery (Montes et al., 2022). However, the fulfilment of these rights cannot be measured solely by the existence of a reconciliation agreement. Genuine victim protection requires that participation and consent be informed, voluntary, and free from familial, social, economic, or institutional pressure. Therefore, victims must be placed at the centre of restorative justice, not merely as parties expected to forgive offenders, but as individuals whose dignity, autonomy, safety, and recovery constitute fundamental indicators of a fair and legitimate settlement.

The implementation of restorative justice creates an important tension between reconciliation as a means of restoring justice and reconciliation as a process that may place pressure on victims. In principle, reconciliation should result from the voluntary, informed, and meaningful participation of both victims and offenders, with the primary objective of repairing harm and addressing the needs of those affected by criminal conduct. However, a victim's formal agreement to settle a case does not necessarily indicate genuine consent. Victims may accept reconciliation because of pressure from the offender, family members, community leaders, law-enforcement officials, or other influential parties (El-Kady, 2024). Economic dependency, unequal social status, fear of retaliation, emotional exhaustion, cultural expectations, and limited knowledge of legal rights may also affect the victim's ability to make an independent decision. Under such circumstances, reconciliation may become a procedural mechanism for terminating a criminal case rather than a genuine process of restoration. Therefore, the legitimacy of restorative justice should not be assessed solely on the existence of a peace agreement, but also on whether the victim was adequately informed, protected from intimidation, given sufficient opportunity to express their needs, and provided with appropriate reparation and recovery. Maintaining a clear distinction between voluntary reconciliation and pressured settlement is essential to ensure that restorative justice does not reproduce existing inequalities or sacrifice victims' rights in the pursuit of a rapid resolution (Cohen, 2022).

Law students' perceptions are important because they reflect how future legal professionals understand the principles of restorative justice and the protection of victims' rights. As individuals who study criminal law, criminal procedure, human rights, and theories of justice, law students are expected to develop the ability to assess whether a legal settlement is procedurally valid, substantively fair, and responsive to the needs of victims (Yin, 2026; Syakur et al., 2025). Their understanding is particularly relevant because many law graduates may later work as judges, prosecutors, police officers, advocates, legal academics, or policymakers whose decisions can influence the implementation of restorative justice. Examining their perceptions can reveal whether legal education has adequately introduced victim-centred approaches, voluntary participation, informed consent, reparation, and protection from intimidation. It can also identify misconceptions, such as viewing reconciliation merely as the termination of a criminal case or assuming that a signed agreement automatically reflects the victim's free will. Therefore, the perceptions of law students provide valuable insight into the preparedness of future legal practitioners to apply restorative justice in a manner that respects victims' dignity, autonomy, safety, and right to recovery.

Previous studies have provided important normative analyses of the transformation of restorative justice within Indonesia's criminal justice system. Riziq (2025) examined the shift from retributive to restorative justice and identified the absence of comprehensive legislation, limited institutional capacity, and conservative law-enforcement culture as significant obstacles. However, their study was conducted before the enactment of Law Number 20 of 2025 and was based exclusively on normative legal materials. Denasty (2025) subsequently analysed restorative justice within the 2025 Criminal Procedure Code Bill from a *pro victima et societatis* perspective and highlighted the risk that restorative mechanisms could become merely procedural or be used to pressure victims into accepting unfair settlements. Nevertheless, the study remained predominantly normative and examined a legislative draft rather than perceptions arising after the enactment of the new Criminal Procedure Code. Meanwhile, Irawan et al. (2025) compared Police Regulation Number 8 of 2021 with Law Number 20 of 2025 and found that the new KUHP provides a more integrated framework, stronger judicial supervision, and improved protection of victims' rights. Their analysis, however, focused on regulatory harmonisation and did not involve empirical participants. Thus, limited attention has been given to how law students, as future legal professionals, understand victims' rights, voluntary participation, and the distinction between genuine reconciliation and agreements influenced by pressure or coercion. This study addresses that gap through a descriptive qualitative investigation of law students' perceptions of victims' rights protection in the implementation of restorative justice under Law Number 20 of 2025.

The urgency of this study lies in the need to ensure that the normative transformation introduced by Law Number 20 of 2025 is accompanied by an appropriate transformation in legal understanding and professional values. The existence of statutory provisions alone cannot guarantee victim-centred restorative justice when future legal practitioners continue to perceive reconciliation merely as the termination of criminal proceedings. Previous research has warned that restorative justice may become formalistic, be interpreted as impunity, or be exploited to pressure victims into accepting unfair agreements. It is therefore essential to examine how law students understand victims' rights, voluntary consent, reparation, recovery, and protection from coercion. Their perceptions are particularly important because they reflect the readiness of future legal professionals to implement restorative justice consistently with the principles of substantive justice and victim protection. Thereby, the study leads to two research questions:

1. How do law students understand the protection of victims' rights in the implementation of restorative justice under Law Number 20 of 2025?
2. How do law students perceive the distinction between voluntary reconciliation and pressured settlement in restorative justice proceedings?

2. Method

This study employed a descriptive qualitative approach to explore law students' understanding and perceptions of the protection of victims' rights in the implementation of restorative justice under Law Number 20 of 2025 concerning the Indonesian Criminal Procedure Code (Stanley, 2023). A qualitative design was considered appropriate because the study sought to obtain an in-depth account of how students interpreted victims' rights, voluntary reconciliation, and the possibility of pressure or coercion in restorative justice proceedings. Rather than measuring participants' perceptions statistically, the study focused on the meanings, arguments, and legal considerations underlying their responses. The study recruited two law students from two private universities in Malang, which were anonymised as University A and University B to maintain institutional confidentiality. Participants were selected using purposive sampling based on their relevance to the research objectives (Robinson, 2024). The inclusion criteria required participants to be active undergraduate law students, to have completed or be currently taking courses in Criminal Law and Criminal Procedure Law, to possess basic knowledge of restorative justice, and to be willing to participate voluntarily in the study (Uhl, 2023). Participants were recruited from both universities to obtain perspectives from students with different academic environments and learning experiences. The number of participants was determined gradually based on data saturation, namely the point at which additional interviews no longer generated substantially new information or themes.

Primary data were collected through semi-structured in-depth interviews (Xu et al., 2025). An interview guide was developed based on the two research questions and focused on participants' understanding of victims' rights, victim participation, restitution and recovery, voluntary consent, and the distinction between genuine reconciliation and pressured settlement. The semi-structured format enabled the researcher to ask the same main questions of all participants while allowing follow-up questions to explore relevant answers in greater depth. Each interview was conducted individually in a quiet and accessible setting, either face-to-face or through an online meeting platform, depending on the participant's availability. With the participant's consent, the interviews were audio-recorded and subsequently

transcribed verbatim. Field notes were also prepared to document important expressions, contextual information, and the researcher's observations during the interviews. Secondary data were obtained through document analysis, including Law Number 20 of 2025 concerning the Indonesian Criminal Procedure Code, relevant regulations on restorative justice, books, journal articles, and previous studies concerning victims' rights and restorative justice. These documents were used to provide the legal and conceptual framework for interpreting the interview findings. However, the study did not aim to evaluate the actual performance of law-enforcement institutions, as its primary focus was the understanding and perceptions of law students.

The data were analysed using an interactive qualitative analysis process consisting of data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing and verification (Miles & Huberman, 1994). First, the interview transcripts were read repeatedly to identify statements relevant to the research questions. The data were then coded and grouped into categories and themes, including understanding of victims' rights, meaningful participation, voluntary reconciliation, forms of pressure, victim recovery, and necessary legal safeguards. The resulting themes were presented narratively and compared across participants from the two universities. Conclusions were drawn by interpreting the patterns, similarities, differences, and legal reasoning found in participants' responses. The trustworthiness of the findings was strengthened through source triangulation, document analysis, and member checking. Source triangulation was conducted by comparing the views of participants from the two private universities and from different academic levels. Document analysis was used to compare participants' perceptions with the relevant legal provisions and academic literature. Member checking was undertaken by asking selected participants to confirm whether the researcher's summary or interpretation accurately represented their intended views. Ethical principles were observed throughout the research process. Participants received information regarding the objectives, procedures, voluntary nature, and confidentiality of the study before providing informed consent. They were informed that they could decline to answer particular questions or withdraw from the study without negative consequences. Participants' names and institutional identities were replaced with codes, and interview recordings and transcripts were stored securely and used solely for research purposes. In addition, the interview form will be based on below instrument.

Research question	Dimension	Indicators	Interview focus
How do law students understand the protection of victims' rights in the implementation of restorative justice under Law Number 20 of 2025?	Understanding of restorative justice	Definition, objectives, parties involved, and differences from conventional criminal proceedings	Students' conceptual understanding of restorative justice
	Position of victims	Victims as witnesses, participants, or rights-bearing subjects	How students perceive the role of victims
	Victims' procedural rights	Information, participation, legal assistance, safety, and opportunity to express needs	Rights that must be guaranteed during restorative proceedings
	Victims' substantive rights	Restitution, compensation, apology, psychological recovery, and restoration of dignity	Forms of recovery considered appropriate
	Legal protection under the new KUHP	Adequacy of legal protection, enforcement mechanisms, and institutional responsibility	Students' assessment of the new legal framework
How do law students perceive the distinction between voluntary reconciliation and pressured settlement in restorative justice proceedings?	Voluntary reconciliation	Informed consent, freedom of choice, sufficient information, and opportunity to refuse	Characteristics of genuine reconciliation

Research question	Dimension	Indicators	Interview focus
	Pressured settlement	Intimidation, economic dependence, family pressure, community pressure, and institutional influence	Conditions that may undermine victims' consent
	Power imbalance	Differences in wealth, status, authority, education, gender, or social influence	Effects of unequal relationships on the victim's decision
	Role of facilitators	Neutrality of police officers, prosecutors, judges, lawyers, and community leaders	Safeguards against pressure or coercion
	Ideal protection	Legal assistance, confidential consultation, judicial review, cooling-off period, and monitoring of agreements	Measures needed to protect victims

Table 1. Interview Instrument

3. Result and Discussion

The study involved two undergraduate law students from two private universities in Malang. Student A, coded as SA-01, was a seventh-semester student who had completed Criminal Law, Criminal Procedure Law, Criminology, Victimology, and Human Rights Law. Student B, coded as SB-01, was a sixth-semester student who had completed Criminal Law and Criminology and was taking Criminal Procedure Law at the time of the interview. Both participants had previously encountered the concept of restorative justice through lectures, seminars, journal articles, news reports, or social media. However, their levels of familiarity with Law Number 20 of 2025 differed.

3.1. Law Students' Understanding of Restorative Justice

The findings indicate that both participants understood restorative justice as an approach that differs from the conventional punitive model of criminal justice. They recognised that restorative justice should not merely determine the guilt of the offender or impose punishment, but should also repair the harm caused to the victim, encourage offender accountability, and restore damaged social relationships.

Student A demonstrated a relatively comprehensive and victim-centred understanding. The participant stated:

"The main purpose is not simply to punish the offender but to repair the victim's losses, encourage the offender to accept responsibility, and restore social relationships."

This response shows that Student A understood restorative justice through three interconnected elements: victim recovery, offender responsibility, and social restoration. The participant also rejected the assumption that restorative justice necessarily eliminates punishment, indicating an understanding that restorative mechanisms may complement rather than automatically replace the formal criminal process.

Student B initially described restorative justice as:

"A way of resolving a criminal case through reconciliation between the offender and the victim."

This initial understanding was more strongly associated with reconciliation and avoiding court proceedings. Nevertheless, as the interview progressed, Student B clarified that restorative justice should also include compensation, recovery, and responsibility. The participant acknowledged:

"It should not only be about withdrawing the report or terminating the case."

The difference between the two responses suggests varying levels of conceptual development. Student A appeared to possess a more integrated understanding, likely influenced by the completion of Victimology and Human Rights Law. Student B had a general understanding of restorative justice but had not yet fully mastered the detailed provisions of the new KUHAP.

These findings support previous research describing restorative justice as a transformation from punishment-oriented justice toward victim recovery, offender accountability, and social reconciliation (Sulistiya and Sodikin, 2025). Riziq (2025) identified the broader transition from retributive to restorative justice in Indonesia, although their study relied on normative legal analysis rather than participants' views. The present findings add an educational and empirical dimension by showing that students may understand the general principle of restoration while differing in the depth of their legal and conceptual knowledge.

3.2. Victims as Rights-Bearing Participants

Both participants believed that victims should not be treated merely as witnesses or sources of evidence. Instead, victims should be placed as active participants and rights-holders within the restorative justice process.

Student A explained:

“Victims should be placed as active participants and rights-holders, not merely as witnesses.”

Similarly, Student B stated:

“Victims should have an important position because they are directly affected by the crime.”

The participants identified several rights that should be guaranteed before, during, and after restorative justice proceedings. These included the right to receive legal information, the right to understand the consequences of accepting or rejecting reconciliation, the right to legal and psychological assistance, the right to participate in determining the agreement, the right to protection from intimidation, and the right to material and non-material recovery (Novita et al., 2025). The participants also distinguished between material and non-material forms of restoration. Material recovery included compensation, restitution, medical expenses, return of property, and repair of damage (Ahmad et al., 2025). Non-material recovery included psychological assistance, restoration of reputation, apology, safety, and recovery from emotional trauma.

Student A emphasised that:

“Money may compensate for material losses, but it cannot always repair psychological trauma, fear, humiliation, or damage to reputation.”

Student B expressed a similar view by stating that an apology may be meaningful in certain minor cases but is insufficient where the victim has experienced injury, financial loss, or trauma. These responses indicate that the participants did not define victim protection narrowly (Mulder and Bohner, 2025). They understood recovery as a multidimensional process involving legal, financial, psychological, social, and personal dimensions. This is consistent with the *pro victima* orientation identified in previous scholarship. Denasty (2025) argued that restorative justice must place victims at the centre of the justice process and guarantee participation, legal assistance, psychosocial support, and meaningful reparation (Heward-Belle, S., & Hughes, 2025). The findings also demonstrate that the participants associated victim protection with autonomy. Both students stated that victims must have the right to reject restorative justice (Almanza et al., 2026). This is significant because victim participation cannot be considered meaningful when acceptance of reconciliation is treated as an obligation.

3.3. A Peace Agreement Does Not Automatically Prove Victim Protection

A central finding of the study is that both participants rejected a purely formalistic understanding of reconciliation. Neither participant considered a written peace agreement or the victim's signature sufficient evidence that the process was voluntary or fair.

Student A stated:

“A signature only proves that the victim signed the document. It does not automatically prove that the victim understood the agreement or signed it voluntarily.”

Student B similarly explained:

“A written agreement is important as evidence, but it does not necessarily show that the victim agreed voluntarily.”

These statements reveal a distinction between formal consent and substantive consent. Formal consent is demonstrated through a signature or written agreement (Hsu et al., 2023). Substantive consent requires understanding, freedom of choice, access to information, protection from pressure, and the ability to reject the proposed settlement. The participants therefore considered the process through which an agreement was reached as important as the final document. They suggested that law-enforcement officials should examine whether the victim understood the agreement, whether legal assistance was available, whether there was a power imbalance, and whether the victim had sufficient time to make a decision. This finding directly responds to concerns raised in previous studies. Denasty (2025) warned that restorative justice may become a merely formal administrative procedure in which forgiveness, compensation, or written agreement substitutes for genuine restoration. The same study also identified the possibility that powerful parties may pressure victims into accepting unfair agreements. The participants' responses therefore show an awareness that procedural completion does not necessarily produce substantive justice (Sommers and Bohns, 2026). A restorative justice process may satisfy documentary requirements while failing to protect the victim's dignity and freedom.

3.4. Understanding Voluntary Reconciliation

Both participants defined voluntary reconciliation as an agreement made freely, knowingly, and without intimidation or manipulation. They emphasised that victims should understand the legal consequences of the agreement and should know that refusing restorative justice remains a legitimate option.

Student A described voluntary reconciliation as:

“The victim agrees freely, understands the legal consequences, and is not influenced by threats, manipulation, dependence, or pressure.”

Student B stated:

“The victim should be able to say yes or no freely.”

These responses demonstrate that voluntariness contains at least four components. Those are sufficient legal and procedural information, freedom to accept or reject, absence of direct and indirect pressure, and sufficient time and opportunity to consider the decision. The participants also believed that voluntariness should be verified independently. They recommended that victims be interviewed separately from offenders, family members, and community leaders. Student A suggested asking victims to explain the agreement in their own words to determine whether they genuinely understood its contents. Student B warned against leading questions by officials who may imply that reconciliation is the preferred or expected outcome. These responses demonstrate that consent should not be inferred merely from the absence of an explicit objection (Liu et al., 2023; Syakur et al., 2026). A victim may remain silent or sign an agreement because of fear, respect for authority, or an inability to challenge more powerful parties.

3.5. Knowledge of Law Number 20 of 2025

The interviews revealed a difference between general conceptual awareness and detailed legal knowledge. Student A demonstrated greater confidence in discussing victim recovery, restitution, compensation, judicial oversight, and the integrated regulation of restorative justice. Student B understood the general direction of the new KUHP but openly acknowledged limited knowledge of its specific provisions.

Student B stated:

“We often know the concept but not the detailed procedures.”

This statement indicates an educational gap. Students may recognise restorative justice as a progressive legal concept but remain unfamiliar with the detailed rules governing its application (Lyubansky et al., 2022; Syakur et al., 2026). This may affect their ability to identify procedural violations or inadequate victim protection. The difference between Student A and Student B may be connected to semester level, completed courses, exposure to victimology, seminar participation, and independent reading. However, because the study involved only two participants, no broad causal conclusion can be drawn. The finding should instead be understood as an indication that the depth of students’ knowledge may vary according to their academic experiences.

Overall, the findings show that both students held generally positive views of restorative justice but did not accept reconciliation uncritically. They believed that restorative justice could provide greater space for victims, promote offender responsibility, and produce more meaningful recovery than punishment alone. At the same time, they recognised that the process could disadvantage victims when it prioritised efficiency, social harmony, or case termination (Jiang and Chen, 2023). The major similarity between the two participants was their rejection of the assumption that a signed peace agreement automatically represents justice. Both considered voluntariness, informed consent, legal assistance, freedom from pressure, and meaningful recovery essential. The main difference concerned the depth of legal understanding (Supriyanto and Sulaiman, 2025; Syakur et al., 2026). Student A demonstrated a more developed victim-centred and multidimensional interpretation, whereas Student B initially associated restorative justice with reconciliation and avoidance of court proceedings before expanding the explanation to include recovery and responsibility.

These findings answer the first research question by showing that the participants understood victim protection as involving information, participation, autonomy, safety, assistance, restitution, compensation, and psychological recovery. They answer the second research question by showing that voluntary reconciliation was understood as informed and freely given consent, while pressured settlement was associated with direct threats, indirect persuasion, economic vulnerability, social expectations, institutional influence, and power imbalance. The findings suggest that the implementation of Law Number 20 of 2025 requires not only clear legal procedures but also legal actors who can recognise subtle forms of pressure. Restorative justice should therefore be evaluated not merely by the existence of reconciliation or the number of cases resolved, but by the extent to which victims are heard, protected, restored, and permitted to make genuinely independent decisions.

4. Conclusion

This study concludes that the two participating law students generally understood restorative justice as a victim-centred approach that should extend beyond reconciliation and the termination of criminal proceedings. They perceived victims as active rights-holders who must be provided with adequate legal information, meaningful participation, independent assistance, protection from intimidation, and opportunities to obtain both material and non-material recovery. Material recovery may include restitution, compensation, medical expenses, or the return of property, while non-material recovery may involve psychological support, restoration of dignity and reputation, personal safety, and a sincere acknowledgement of the harm caused. Although both participants demonstrated an understanding of these principles, their knowledge of the specific provisions of Law Number 20 of 2025 differed, indicating that general awareness of restorative justice does not necessarily correspond with detailed knowledge of its legal procedures.

The findings also demonstrate that the participants clearly distinguished voluntary reconciliation from pressured settlement. Voluntary reconciliation was understood as a decision made freely, knowingly, and with a genuine opportunity to accept or reject the proposed settlement. In contrast, pressured settlement may result not only from direct threats or intimidation but also from less visible influences, including family persuasion, community expectations, economic vulnerability, institutional pressure, emotional exhaustion, and unequal social status. Accordingly, a signed peace agreement cannot, by itself, be treated as conclusive evidence that the victim’s consent was voluntary or that the victim’s rights were adequately protected. The circumstances in which the agreement was reached must also be examined. To protect victims, the participants considered independent legal assistance, confidential interviews, adequate time for reflection, judicial review, the right to withdraw consent before approval, and monitoring of the agreement’s implementation to be essential safeguards. These findings suggest that the success of restorative justice under Law Number 20 of 2025 should not be measured merely by the number of cases

resolved or agreements signed. Instead, it should be evaluated according to whether victims are genuinely heard, protected, restored, and able to make independent decisions without pressure. The study further indicates that legal education plays an important role in preparing future legal professionals to implement restorative justice appropriately. Law students should therefore be exposed not only to statutory provisions but also to victimology, trauma-informed approaches, power imbalances, ethical interviewing, case simulations, and practical analysis of restorative proceedings. Such preparation is necessary to prevent restorative justice from becoming a formal mechanism for closing cases at the expense of victims' autonomy and substantive justice. Because this study involved only two law students from two private universities in Malang, its findings are exploratory and cannot be generalised to all law students. Further research involving a larger and more diverse group of students, lecturers, victims, advocates, and law-enforcement officials would provide a more comprehensive understanding of victims' rights protection in the implementation of restorative justice under the new Indonesian Criminal Procedure Code.

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