

**The Dynamics of Crime Seriousness and Victims' Preference to Participate in Online
and Offline Victim-Offender Mediation**

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Abstract

Despite the success rate regarding Victim-offender mediation (VOM), many still refuse to participate, especially individuals who experienced a traumatic event tend to be reluctant towards it. This study will therefore investigate the influence of crime seriousness and victims' preference to participate in different VOM forms, getting a better insight into how to improve participation rates. It was expected that participants in the major (but not minor) condition would prefer online VOM over offline (indirect) mediation, due to the perception of more safety and the increased importance of fluentness and richness in communication, for them. To test this, a total of 50 participants answered a questionnaire to measure their willingness to participate in online and offline (indirect) VOM forms (face-to-face, video calling, video messaging, letter, and shuttle mediation). The manipulation of crime seriousness, defined by harmfulness and wrongfulness, was administered and worked as intended. Participants were randomly assigned to either the minor crime condition, where they had to imagine a less serious event, or the major crime condition, imagining a more serious event. The results indicated no support for the hypotheses. Interestingly though, a significant positive association was observed between harmfulness and video messaging mediation willingness to participate and perceived safety in video messaging, which does converge with the idea that perceived safety of communication is more important for those that think about a more harmful event. Additionally, a significant positive association between general seriousness and video messaging mediation willingness to participate in VOM was observed, in line with the expectations.

Keywords: restorative justice, victim-offender mediation, crime seriousness, perceived safety, perceived importance of communication fluentness and richness

The Dynamics of Crime Seriousness and Victims' Preference to Participate in Online and Offline Victim-Offender Mediation

“Societies all over the world have integrated restorative approaches in their justice system to humanize court processes and to manage disputes between conflicting parties more effectively” (Bonensteffen et al., 2022, p.2).

Victim-offender mediation (VOM) is an important form of restorative justice (RJ), which displays various advantages. Yet, there are still many individuals who decline the opportunity to participate, when offered, because of its potential negative impact on their lives and unsuitable VOM forms. The emergence of several forms of VOM might be able to provide a solution for this challenge. One of the first forms to be implemented was offline face-to-face mediation, followed by indirect (letter and shuttle) mediation, and later on the possibility of online (video calling, video messaging) mediation. Overcoming obstacles, such as non-participation, is important to help more victims to cope better with a hurtful event and their life afterwards. Especially serious crime cases might profit from VOM, due to that the focus on the impact of crime seriousness to participate in different VOM forms is essential. Also, further theoretical knowledge about victims' motivation to participate in different VOM forms, might help to improve programs, participation rates, and in general the justice system (Bonensteffen et al., 2022; Hansen & Umbreit, 2018; Latimer et al., 2005; Zebel et al., 2017; Zehr, 2015).

Victim-offender mediation (VOM) is one of the most common, researched, and widespread forms of formal restorative justice practice in justice systems worldwide, as well as one of the first Restorative justice (RJ) approaches, developed in the 1970s (Gerkin, 2008; Nugent et al., 2001; Umbreit & Armour, 2011). VOM can be conceptualized as a humanistic approach to dialogue, in which the individuals share their narratives and listen to each other. This approach strengthens the communication and connection of the participants, as well as the awareness of the mediator, to increase the potential of a healing encounter (Jonas et al., 2022). The mediator is preparing the victim and offender before a mediated session, to ensure that both sides attend voluntarily. Furthermore, they build a connection with both individuals separately and explain the whole process to them. The mediator needs to be authentic, nondirective, and present during this time, to connect with the participants and provide an emotionally and physically safe space for the mediation. After the mediation, the mediator calls as a check-up to ensure that both parties are doing well (Hansen & Umbreit, 2018; Jonas et al., 2022).

Since then, RJ forms started to emerge and grow constantly, as an addition to conventional criminal justice, throughout the world and became increasingly important (D'Souza & L'Hoiry, 2019). This importance is reflected in the various definitions, scientists of this domain, came up with. The more crucial the topic became the more researchers tried to redefine and specify its meaning. It is quite difficult to define RJ, because of its complexity, some researchers, however, created definitions to be able to apply and assess RJ empirically (Daly, 2015). One commonly and internationally accepted definition provided by Marshall (1999) defines RJ as "a process whereby parties with a stake in a specific offence collectively resolve how to deal with the aftermath of the offence and its implications for the future" (p. 5). Another definition according to Daly (2015) entails that RJ is a "*contemporary justice mechanism* to address crime, disputes, and bounded community conflict. The mechanism is a *meeting* (or several meetings) of affected individuals, facilitated by one or more impartial people" (p.21). Daly defines that meetings can be organised throughout the criminal process (prearrest, diversion from court, presentence, and postsentence) and for offences or conflicts that were not reported to the police. He mentions that during those meetings "specific practices will vary, depending on context, but are guided by rules and procedures that align with what is appropriate in the context of the crime, dispute, or bounded conflict" (Daly, 2015, p. 21).

RJ intends to address crimes or disputes in the form of an umbrella concept that stands for several activities, typically meetings which are often informal but structured. Expected or desired outcomes in the process are not restricted to reparation, restoration, or reconciliation, they vary by context and purpose and may even exhibit therapeutic effects (Daly, 2015). Such outcomes might include social well-being, through the use of community resources and the perception of community concern, the individual's quality of life can be increased and in turn influence the community's well-being (Presser & Van Voorhis, 2002). This idea resulted in various other restorative justice programs, such as Victim offender mediation programs (VOMP), victim offender reconciliation programs (VORP), family group conferencing, community reparative boards, sentencing, and restorative circles, or sentencing panels, with different procedures or principles (Gerkin, 2008). Victims and offenders of any kind of offense, that decide to participate voluntarily, are the main actors in such strategies, they are emboldened to participate in the resolution of their conflict. RJ proposes that offenders are also humans who did something wrong but might deserve a second chance. Both sides can experience emotional and psychological benefits through a restorative justice approach, such benefits differ for victims and offenders. The victims' reasons to participate include that they

might be able to hear the offender take responsibility, prevent further offences or help with the rehabilitation process of the offender. Furthermore, they might be able to better understand why the offender committed the crime, achieve restoration in form of an apology or consider forgiveness as part of their own healing process (Bolívar, 2013). The offenders' motivations to participate include for instance that they might be able to help the victims move on and move on with their own lives, tell the victims why they committed 'the act', apologise, or pay them back, there is also the possibility of cleaning their criminal record (Hansen & Umbreit, 2018).

Victim-offender mediation

Especially VOM, which is also known under names such as Victim Offender Reconciliation Program (VORP), Victim offender mediation program (VOMP), or victim-offender dialogue, holds many advantages. The uniqueness of this practice is the personal interaction between victim and offender, the high structure of a session, and a participating mediator (Hansen & Umbreit, 2018). In such processes, victims of a crime and their offender are brought together into a safe setting where the offender can be held accountable and the crime or wrongdoing, and its impacts are exchanged and discussed; afterwards, it is searched for ways to make things right again (Jonas et al., 2022; Umbreit et al., 2000).

Research findings showed that both parties (victim and offender) involved in VOM reported higher levels of satisfaction than participants in court proceedings. They also perceived psychosocial benefits, such as feeling better, safer, and empowered by being part of the rehabilitation process (De Mesmaeker, 2011; Umbreit, 1994). Additionally, most VOMs result in restitution agreements that are more likely to be fulfilled than those from traditional justice processes, victims in VOM often receive an apology (which they value), offenders are less likely to recidivate and it is cost-saving in time and money (Hansen & Umbreit, 2018; Jonas et al., 2022). Furthermore, the victims healing process can be improved by meeting the victims needs in VOM and the offender's empathy development likewise, which might result in decreased criminal behaviour (Umbreit et al., 2004).

Offline VOM

VOM can be differentiated into two types and a subtype. The first and most common one is the direct face-to-face practice, where victim and offender meet up in one place, in person, and talk to each other in a room with a mediator. Even though positive results can be found, many individuals perceive this, even when they are told that they are in a safe environment, still as too confronting or dangerous. The risk of the offender attacking or a revictimization of the individual might put too much stress and fear on parties that had

traumatic experiences and are still scared, it would be too appalling for them to see the offender in real life. Another reason might also be that one side considers the crime to be too unimportant to invest time and money into traveling to the mediation meeting (Bonensteffen et al., 2022; Hansen & Umbreit, 2018; Umbreit et al., 2004).

Indirect VOM

A subtype of offline VOM is the indirect VOM form, which includes a form of letter exchange or shuttle mediation. Letters are for example written by victim and offender and read to the other party, or where messages are shuttled between the participants, by the mediator. As research shows, those alternatives are in one-third of victims preferred, because of the fear to meet an offender (Hansen & Umbreit, 2018). But these indirect types often sort less beneficial results, it is for example difficult to have a fluent communication because the exchanged messages are transferred to the other person with a certain delay, without being able to answer directly. Also, body cues are absent, which could make it difficult to understand the other person correctly, and the mediator might not be able to transmit the feelings accurately. Consequently, participants who attend are often less satisfied than in face-to-face mediation (Bolívar, 2013). The advantages, however, include that participants do not have to put much effort into this VOM type, they do not need to travel to meet with the offender and thus do not invest costs or time (Bonensteffen et al., 2022).

Potential online VOM

The gap between those two options might be able to be closed by another VOM type. Due to the Covid-19 pandemic and the unique situation the world was put in, new challenges arose everywhere, also in the RJ part of society. New ways to communicate, which were invented and used before the pandemic, were now further improved, and internet usage grew. This challenge allowed us to enhance the alternative (third) VOM type, the computer-based communication (CBC), also called e-supported mediation or online mediation (video calling and video messaging). Such mediations are fully or partly computerized and face-to-face, and they are increasingly used (Bollen & Euwema, 2013). During video calling the participants are in separate rooms in front of a computer, or similar device. They can directly communicate through programs like teams or skype, with a mediator as supervisor. Video messages, on the contrary, are recorded by both parties and then exchanged through the mediator. Research findings showed that CBC has the potential to establish informative conversations and could enhance the mediation process. It is also perceived to initiate high feelings of environmental safety, especially for victims. Which could lead to increased participation in VOM, because (stressful) confrontation is often considered a withdrawal

variable in face-to-face mediation. It displays, in addition, major logistic advantages and organisational efficiency and still a wealthy communication, which is for example not the case in indirect mediation forms (Bollen & Euwema, 2013; Bonensteffen et al., 2022). CBC has, additionally, the advantage that messages are transmitted directly from victim to offender and vice versa. This way the message can be correctly conveyed, instead of being eventually restricted, filtered, and wrongly interpreted by the mediator and opposite site, which might alter the initial meaning of the message (Rossi et al., 2017). Online VOM is therefore an efficient combination of offline and indirect VOM, due to its communication richness, communication fluentness, and perceived safety.

Motivations to engage in VOM

Despite the motivations to participate and beneficial outcomes for participants, in the VOM process, it is observed that 20 to 31% of offenders do not agree to meet the victim, mostly not in minor personal crimes (Niemeyer & Shichor, 1996). Offenders might choose not to participate due to a fear of being socially excluded or a threat to their moral-social identity (Groenhuijsen, 2000; Shnabel & Nadler, 2015). 40 to 60% of victims, on the contrary, refuse to engage in VOM, especially in serious crimes, which raises the question of why they do not participate (Bolívar, 2013; Bonensteffen et al., 2022; Gröbe, 2013). Victims often feel anxious, depressed, hostile, or alienated after a crime, this might increase the risk of revictimization and keeps participants from engaging in VOM (Umbreit et al., 2004; Umbreit et al., 2006; Wyrick & Costanzo, 1999). They might be concerned regarding VOM and decline to participate, due to a lack of interest in the crime or mediation, due to feeling unsafe or being afraid of the meeting, or the offender itself (Bolívar, 2013). The choice to participate in VOM can vary across victims, different kinds of VOM, and certain influencing variables, for instance, the influence of significant others, the amount of time elapsed between offense and contact, or crime seriousness (Bolívar, 2013; Wyrick & Costanzo, 1999; Zebel et al., 2017). More forms of VOM continue to emerge or are being integrated into comprehensive programs (justice systems or community mediation centers), such as online VOM (video messaging or video calling meetings), but it is not widely used yet, which frequently leaves only limited options for individuals, that might not be suitable for them, like offline VOM (face-to-face meetings). Often many options, or VOM in general, are not even mentioned, let alone explained to individuals, this additionally could explain why participation rates are not as high (Gerkin, 2008; Lightfoot & Umbreit, 2004; Shenk, 2001).

It is however important to note that this area of VOM is still not completely explored yet and many areas will need an additional focus in future research, to be able to contribute to

the current literature. The victims' choice of the victim-offender mediation form and the probable advantages of participating in online mediation (video calling and video messaging), in relation to minor and serious offenses, in this study, might offer new insights into the debate, existing in the literature, about the appropriateness and feasibility of VOM. It might help to understand which and how victims choose to participate, to experience the possible beneficial outcomes, mentioned in the literature. Knowledge about crime seriousness and VOM forms might help professionals to facilitate victims' needs and desires better, regarding offender contact. Additionally, it might prevent pitfalls, such as providing the wrong VOM form and help instead to offer the most suitable possible option for the victim of a serious crime, which could lead to more efficient and beneficial VOMs, and higher participation rates (Zebel et al., 2017). Furthermore, there are diverse motivations for victims to participate in VOM or not; it is, therefore, important to implicate which variables, influence the participation choice of victims in different forms of VOM (Hansen & Umbreit, 2018; Van Dijk, 2016).

Crime seriousness

With the increasing acceptance of restorative justice and the success of VOM, several programs have started to extend their practices to more serious and violent crimes, like homicide or sexual assault (Wellikoff, 2004). Therefore, an important variable, that might influence the participants choice of VOM, could be crime seriousness. For a long time now, studies and researchers have been debating whether VOM is appropriate and beneficial for serious offenses, thus, if serious offenses might be able to influence the victim's choice of VOM. The current literature though did not yet answer clearly in what way or to what extent crime seriousness affects VOM and it can also be seen that crime seriousness is not yet empirically assessed as a predictor, in many articles, which makes the current study important (Zebel et al., 2017). It was however observed that the reduction in reoffending tends to be larger for violent than property offenses, which indicates that face-to-face victim offender exchanges, and possibly also other forms of VOM, might be effective for more serious offenses. This positive outcome and other benefits, such as emotional restoration, especially occurred among victims and offenders who participated voluntarily (Sherman et al., 2015). Additionally, victims of serious crimes, with high levels of suffering, are often assumed to be unwilling to engage in mediated contact with offenders, especially when the crime happened recently (Zebel et al., 2017). But Nugent et al. (2001) found that many crime victims expressed the need for broader programs that include severely violent crimes. An important

question, therefore, is whether and how crime seriousness affects the willingness or preference of individuals to participate in VOM (Zebel et al., 2017).

Before this question can be answered, crime seriousness must be defined first, to understand the concept and what it entails. Research showed that laypeople generally agree on relative seriousness of a crime, but it is important to keep in mind that there is no clear definition of crime seriousness yet and individuals might interpret it differently. In future research it might be important to focus on the methodological validity of survey methods, to ensure a clear definition and similar interpretations, for valid results. Warr (1989) was the first one to suggest instead that crime seriousness can be explained by the two logical dimensions harmfulness and wrongfulness. The perceived wrongfulness can be described as the normative or moral evaluation of a situation or offense and the perceived harmfulness can be characterised as the evaluation of the degree of (material and immaterial) harm inflicted or the emotional impact of the offense upon victims (O'Connell & Whelan, 1996; Zebel et al., 2017).

Furthermore, an indication for the influence of crime seriousness and its effect on individuals VOM participation might be that victims who experience an offense as very harmful and wrongful (high crime seriousness) are likely to refuse to participate in face-to-face VOM because they might perceive it as too confrontational and unsafe (Bonesteffen et al., 2022). They might also decline indirect VOM (letter exchange or shuttle mediation), since they perceive it as difficult to convey their strong feelings, that they might have about the serious offense they experienced, through such methods. Victims might thus be inclined to prefer online mediation (video calling and video messaging) instead (Bonesteffen et al., 2022; Shapland et al., 2007).

The question of whether the crime seriousness affects the VOM participation choice was partly addressed and answered, in the existing literature, for example by Zebel et al. (2017). A form of pattern of crime seriousness as predictor of participation choice was found, but its impact might vary by program type, focus, or nature of the crime. Nonetheless, the studies by Zebel et al. (2017) and Wyrick and Costanzo (1999) argued that research shows that restorative justice programs, like VOM, might be suited for more serious crimes, especially for participants where some time elapsed since the offense. Furthermore, VOM programs working with cases of severe violence have increased; but it is important to note that this also requires more training and preparation of the parties involved. Even if crimes with high seriousness are at the moment, often, only dealt with in court, without mediation, and mediation predominantly occurs in less serious crimes, this does not mean it has to stay that way (Umbreit et al., 2003; Umbreit & Vos, 2000).

Research questions and hypotheses

The current theory leads to the research question: *To what degree does crime seriousness influence the victim's preference to participate in different forms of victim-offender mediation?*

This research might show a possibility for future change in how VOM is presented and viewed, in crimes with a high seriousness, especially with new options such as CBC or e-supported mediations. Finding effects might help, in the future, to improve handling severe crime victim-offender mediations and be better prepared for them. As mentioned in Bonensteffen et al. (2022), victims often refuse to participate in victim-offender mediation, because they fear the direct contact with the offender. Recently, however, was CBC established, which makes it possible for victims to communicate with the offender through the computer. This might lead to a higher feeling of safety for the victim, a richer communication and higher convenience, than with the offline (face-to-face) or indirect VOM.

The first hypothesis is therefore as follows:

H1: Victims of serious crimes prefer online (video calling and video messaging) over offline (face-to-face) and indirect (letter exchange and shuttle mediation) victim-offender mediation; this is not the case for victims of minor crimes.

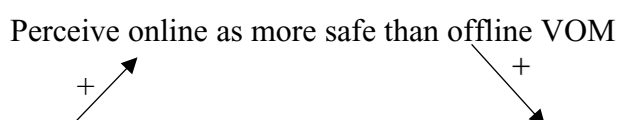
Next to the hypothesized positive relationship of hypothesis one, is the second and third hypothesis, which will explain the reasons behind hypothesis one. The second and third hypotheses are as follows:

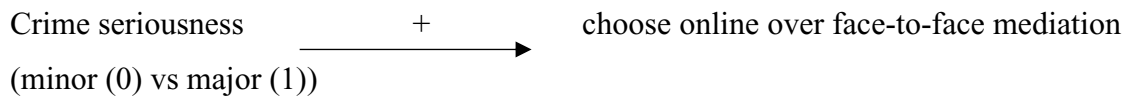
H2: Victims of serious crimes prefer online victim-offender mediation (video calling and video messaging) because they perceive it to provide more safety than offline mediation(face-to-face); this is not the case for victims of minor crimes.

H3: Victims of serious crimes prefer online (video calling and video messaging) over indirect (letter exchange and shuttle mediation) victim-offender mediation because they perceive communication richness and fluency to be more important than victims of minor crimes.

Figure 1

Mediation analysis: the visualized prediction of Hypothesis 2

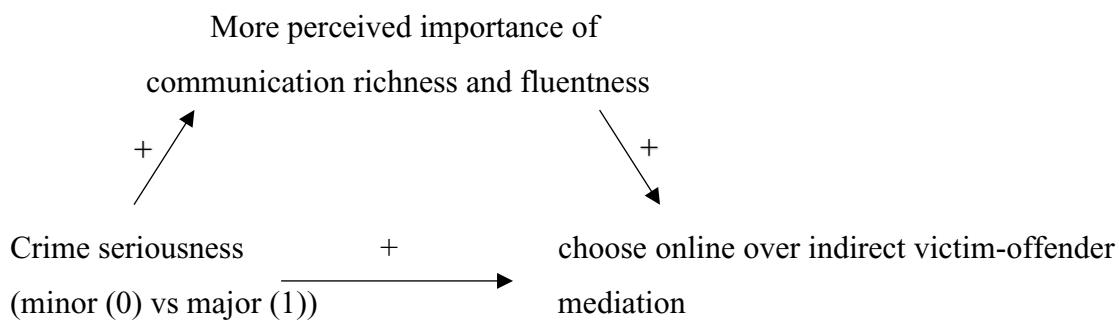




Note. Online VOM entails video calling and video messaging.

Figure 2

Mediation analysis: the visualized prediction of Hypothesis 3



Note. Online VOM entails video calling and video messaging, and indirect VOM entails letter exchange and shuttle mediation.

Method

Participants

In total 77 (100%) individuals participated in the study, 27 (35.06%) of them participated through the test subject pool BMS with their SONA number and the other 50 (64.94%) through convenience and snowball sampling, and Facebook. The inclusion criterion for participating in this study was to understand English sufficiently. Participants were excluded from the study when they did not fill out any questions concerning their event because they could then not be assigned to one of the conditions, their information could not be used and thus they did not add any valuable information to the study. Additionally, participants were asked how serious they participated, if they indicated 0 or 1 it meant that they did not participate seriously and thus also had to be excluded. 27 (35.06%) participants had to be excluded from the study due to these criteria, 1 (1.3%) who indicated that they did not participate seriously and 26 (33.77%) which did not answer an event question. The data of 50 (64.94% -> 100%) respondents were ultimately used, of which 36 (72%) were female, 13 (26%) were male and 1 was an undefined participant. The participants were randomly

distributed over the unresolved minor (N = 26, 52%) and unresolved major (N = 24, 48%) condition. The participants mean age was 27, ranging from 18 to 56 years. Most were German (35, 70%), followed by Dutch (4, 8%) and other nationalities, such as Austrian, British, English, Greek, Hong Kong, Indonesian, Iraqi, Polish, and Romanian. The education level of the participants included mostly the secondary education (31, 62%) or a master's degree (8, 16%) and the employment status was mostly students (37, 74%), where most study psychology (27, 54%). Test subject pool BMS participants received 0.25 SONA credits for their participation.

Design

This study adopted a design containing one independent between variable, with 2 levels (crime seriousness: minor vs. major), and five dependent measures (willingness to participate in different forms of VOM: willingness to participate in face-to-face VOM vs. willingness to participate in VOM through video calling vs. willingness to participate in VOM through video messaging vs. willingness to participate in VOM through letter exchange vs. willingness to participate in VOM through shuttle mediation). These five dependent measures were treated as a repeated measures variable.

Independent and dependent variables

Manipulation of crime seriousness. Participants were randomly assigned to one of the two conditions (minor and major) to experimentally manipulate the independent variable crime seriousness. Both groups were shown similar procedure descriptions about a personal unresolved event they had to remember from their lives, with slight differences. In the minor condition, the participants were told to remember a personal unresolved event that they experienced throughout their life, where they felt that another person put them in a situation where they felt mildly unpleasant, offended, or insulted. This event should not have had any major, severe, or fierce harm on them, but it should have had longer-lasting consequences, and concern criminal or punishable behaviour of the other person. It should however still be unresolved today and have left them with something they would like to express or share. They were asked to use follow-up questions as guidance to describe the situation and its circumstances, in which they got hurt mildly, as precise as possible (three to four sentences). These questions were 'Describe the event that led to the hurtful situation:' or 'What exactly did or said the other person that made you or someone else feel hurt?', to gain detailed insights into the participant's event.

In the major condition, however, the participants were told to imagine a serious personal event that they experienced throughout their life, where they experienced high levels

of emotional or physical harm, by another person. This event should have had longer-lasting consequences, and concern criminal or punishable behaviour of the other person. It should still be unresolved today and have left them with something they would like to express or share. They should use follow-up questions as guidance to describe the situation and its circumstances, in which they got hurt severely, as precise as possible (three to four sentences). Such questions were ‘Describe the event that led to the serious, hurtful situation:’ or ‘What exactly did or said the other person that made you or someone else feel hurt seriously?’, to also gain detailed insights into their events.

Dependent measures. The dependent variable willingness to participate in VOM forms consisted of five VOM types which were presented and explained to all participants in a random order. Additionally, the participants were asked to consider each VOM type in relation to the other person, with whom they had their unresolved event, to assess how much they would prefer or refuse each type in comparison to each other and why. The variable was measured repeatedly through several closed 5-point Likert-scale questions, per VOM type, ranging from 0 (not at all) to 4 (very much). Participants received explanations about the types such as Face-to-Face victim-offender mediation which is a direct mediation form where two parties (victim and offender) meet up in a facility (such as a community centre or a police station, etc.) with a mediator. The mediator prepares both parties separately prior to the meeting. During this preparation phase, the expectations and wishes of each party are identified and coordinated to each other. The mediator explains to the victim what is going to happen and what to expect, that they are able to ask questions about the event to cope better with it or that they might get an apology or acknowledgment of their experience and feelings, but that the meeting is not about punishing the offender. The mediator ensures that the mediation is emotionally and physically safe, he also explains the procedure to the offender, that they can apologise, explain the situation from their point of view or ask and answer questions. After the preparations a meeting is scheduled, both parties are brought into a room together with a mediator (which guides the conversation) to talk about the event and its consequences. They share their narratives and listen to each other, after the meeting, the mediator checks in with them to see how both parties are doing.

For video calling, it was stated for participants that this is an online victim-offender mediation form, often programs such as Skype or Zoom, with webcams and microphones available, are used so that both parties can see and talk to each other. Before the mediation, the mediator prepares both parties separately prior to the meeting. During this preparation phase, the expectations and wishes of each party are identified and coordinated to each

other. The mediator explains to the victim what is going to happen and what to expect, for example, that they are able to ask questions about the event to cope better with it or that they might get an apology or acknowledgment of their experience and feelings, but that the meeting is not about punishing the offender. The mediator also explains the procedure to the offender, that they can apologise, explain the situation from their point of view or ask and answer questions. The participants will go to an institution (such as a community centre or a police station, etc.) where they are placed in different rooms in front of a computer (they will not meet in person) and feel comfortable and safe. A mediator is present to guide the conversation and both parties can share their thoughts and emotions about the incident. After the meeting, the mediator checks up on the participants to ask how they are doing and how they experienced the mediation and its process.

Video messaging is also a form of online victim-offender mediation, the victim and offender go separately to an institution (such as a community centre or a police station, etc.) where they can record video messages via, for example, a video camera. Before the mediation, the mediator prepares both parties separately prior the message recording. During this preparation phase, the expectations and wishes of each party are identified and coordinated to each other. The mediator explains to the victim and the offender what is going to happen and what to expect. Both parties are able to record their thoughts and emotions about the incident or apologies, but the meeting (video message exchange) is not about punishing the offender. Those videos are then exchanged and given by the mediator to the other party. Both parties do not meet each other directly, they only meet separately with the mediator, which is present during the recording and watching of the videos, to answer questions and overlook the recording. After the video recording and exchange, the mediator checks up on the participants to ask how they are doing and how they experienced the mediation and its process.

Letter exchange is an indirect form of victim offender mediation, the participants go separately to an institution (such as a community centre or a police station, etc.), where they can write a letter to the other party, which is then exchanged by the mediator. Before the mediation, the mediator prepares both parties separately prior the letter writing and exchange. During this preparation phase, the expectations and wishes of each party are identified and coordinated to each other. The mediator explains to the victim and offender what is going to happen and what to expect. Both parties can write down their thoughts and emotions about the incident or apologies, but the meeting (letter exchange) is not about punishing the offender. Those letters are then exchanged and given by the mediator to the other party. Both

parties do not meet each other directly, they only meet separately with the mediator, which is present during the writing and exchange of the letters, to answer questions and overlook the situation. After the letter writing and exchange, the mediator checks up on the participants to ask how they are doing and how they experienced the mediation and its process.

Shuttle mediation is also an indirect form of victim-offender mediation, where participants go separately to an institution (such as a community centre or a police station, etc.) for a conversation. Before the mediation, the mediator prepares both parties separately prior the shuttle mediation. During this preparation phase, the expectations and wishes of each party are identified and coordinated to each other. The mediator explains to the victim and offender what is going to happen and what to expect. Both parties can explain their thoughts and emotions about the incident or apologise, but the meeting (shuttle mediation) is not about punishing the offender. During the shuttle mediation the victim and offender do not meet each other directly, the mediator communicates and explains the messages in both directions, between both parties, back and forth, until both sides have nothing more to say or ask. The mediator is present to answer questions, overlook the situation, and exchange what the parties say. After the shuttle mediation, the mediator checks up on the participants to ask how they are doing and how they experienced the mediation and its process.

To control for any perceived differences in the degree of effort, these different VOM forms might entail, a clarification about the investment was given in each of the five VOM category explanations. The same effort has to be made in face-to-face mediation ('... in which the two parties (victim and offender) meet up face-to-face in a facility (such as a community centre or a police station, etc.)'), video calling mediation ('...the victim, offender, and mediator will go to an institution (such as a community centre or a police station, etc.)'), video messaging mediation ('... where the victim and offender go separately to an institution (such as a community centre or a police station, etc.)'), letter exchange mediation ('... where the participants go separately to an institution (such as a community centre or a police station, etc.)') and shuttle mediation ('... where the participants go separately to an institution (such as a community centre or a police station, etc.)').

Manipulation check of crime seriousness manipulation

To assess whether this manipulation of crime seriousness worked, five manipulation check questions were provided for crime seriousness (wrongfulness and harmfulness; see also Zebel et al., 2017). Two items were used to rate the perceived wrongfulness of the offense: 'To what extent do you consider the event that you just described as morally reprehensible?' and 'To what extent do you think (did) the other party intended to commit harm?'; these items

correlated positively and significantly, in a moderate manner, $r(49) = .38, p = .008$. Perceived harmfulness was rated with three items: 'To what extent has this event hurt you emotionally?', 'To what degree did you suffer physical damage as a result of the event?' and 'To what extent were you harmed materially as a result of the event (for example damage to your property)?'; these items correlated positively and significantly between $r(49) = .34, p = .017$ and $r(49) = .62, p < .000$, and Cronbach's alpha was $\alpha = .71$. Additionally, the participants were asked, through a one-item measure, how serious they assessed their minor or major event themselves, to get an indication if the manipulation worked.

An experimental analysis in form of three independent samples t-tests (wrongfulness, harmfulness, and perceived general seriousness of the participants event) was done to compare crime seriousness of two conditions (minor vs. major), to check whether the manipulation was successful. No significant difference in the scores for wrongfulness in the minor ($M=2.5, SD=1.4$) versus major ($M=2.5, SD=1.1$) condition was found; $t(48) = 0.06, p = .954$. Unexpectedly, participants in the major condition thus did not perceive their events as more wrongful than the participants in the minor condition.

It was, in addition, checked whether participants in the major crime condition perceived the event to be more harmful than in the minor crime condition, another t-test was conducted. A marginally significant difference in the scores for harmfulness in the minor and in the major condition was found; $t(48) = 1.8, p = .079$. This difference implies that there could still be a real effect, participants in the minor condition ($M=1.5, SD=1.0$) perceived their events to be marginally less harmful compared to participants in the major condition ($M=2.1, SD=1.1$)

Another t-test was conducted for the variable perceived general seriousness of the participants event, that indicated how serious participants rated their event themselves, which also indicated if the manipulation worked. The variable indicated that there was a significant difference in the scores between the minor ($M=2.9, SD=1.1$) and major ($M=3.5, SD=0.7$) condition; $t(48) = 2.34, p = .023$. The result shows that participants in the major condition did perceive their events as general more serious than participants in the minor condition.

It can thus be summarized that there was no significant difference in the perceived wrongfulness manipulation, but a tendency of more perceived harmfulness, in the events participants described, in the major but not in the minor condition. The analyses showed that the events participants described in the major condition showed significantly more perceived seriousness than the events in the minor condition. The manipulation was therefore partially successful.

Coding

The questionnaire (see Appendix A) included multiple open questions such as ‘Describe the event that led to the serious, hurtful situation’, ‘What exactly did or said the other person that made you feel hurt?’, ‘How you felt when you were hurt by the other person’ and ‘What happened after you were hurt?’ for the minor condition, and ‘Describe the event that led to the serious, hurtful situation’, ‘What exactly did or said the other person that made you feel hurt seriously?’, ‘How you felt when you were hurt seriously by the other person’ and ‘What happened after you were hurt seriously?’ for the major condition. The information, given by the participants, of those open questions, can be categorized into different codes for an easier assessment of the participants events. The information of all participants was gathered, and while going through the data every case was analyzed for keywords or phrases that could indicate or match a broader crime category. For instance, the examples coded as attempted crimes could be assigned to that category because of keywords like ‘wanted to’, or phrases like ‘...did ran away , but he did not touch me.’ (see Table 1). After going through the complete data set, every case could be matched to a code (see Table 1; see Table 2).

Table 1

Coding of the minor condition (N=26)

Code	Example	Frequency (%)	Victim
Attempted crimes	‘...got asked from a man to get in his car, even tho I was on my way to the school bus.’ ‘...wanted to punch me...’	2 (7.69%)	Participant 2 (7.69%)
Minor sexual crime	‘Touched in an inappropriate place’ ‘Sexual haressment by an unidentified older (about 60) man (I was 11)’	4 (15.38%)	Participant 3 (11.54%) Someone else 1 (3.85%)
Stalking	‘...try to get me alone, stalk me for 6 months’	2 (7.69%)	Participant 2 (7.69%)

	‘There was a person who was stalking me for some weeks.’		
Aggressive behaviour (1) and violence (2)	‘...tried smashing the windows of our car with his fists.’ ‘...started breaking things around the house...’	(1) 3 (11.54%) (2) 1 (3.85%)	Participant 3 (11.54%) Someone else 1 (3.85%)
Insult (3) and verbal fight (4)	‘He repeatedly insulted, threatened and screamed at me.’ ‘...he threatened to get a knife from the car...’	(3) 6 (23.08%) (4) 6 (23.08%)	Imagined 1 Participant 5 (19.23%) Participant 6 (23.08%)
Fraud (5) and steeling (6)	‘In school, my phone got stolen...’ ‘Kriminelle gaben sich am Telefon als Tochter aus, die einen Autounfall hatte und deshalb dringend Geld benötigt.’ = ‘Criminals posed on the phone as a daughter who had been in a car accident and therefore urgently needed money.’	(5) 1 (3.85%) (6) 1 (3.85%)	Someone else 1 (3.85%) Participant 1 (3.85%)

Note. The victim category includes information about who described the crime (This event happened to me = Participant; This event happened to someone else = Someone else; I imagined this event happening to me = Imagined).

Table 2

Abuse	‘A partner abusing someone I know’ ‘Physical and mental abuse’ ‘...physically and emotionally abusive...’	2 (8.33%)	Someone else 2 (8.33%)
Traumatic experience	‘breaking down’ ‘broken relationship’	4 (16.67%)	Participant 2 (8.33%) Someone else 1 (4.17%) Imagined 1 (4.17%)

Note. The victim category includes information about who described the crime (This event happened to me = Participant; This event happened to someone else = Someone else; I imagined this event happening to me = Imagined).

Procedure

An online survey, designed with Qualtrics for desktop and mobile devices (see Appendix A), was conducted by the participants. They were welcomed, a short introduction to the topic was given (without explaining the study goal yet) and they were informed that they will be asked to recall an emotional event from their past. The participants were informed that participation is voluntarily and anonymized, they can stop at any time, without explanation or justification, and contact the bachelor student for any comments or questions. Informed consent needed to be given by the participants before they could start with the study. General demographic data were collected from the participants, such as ‘Gender’, ‘Nationality’, ‘Age’, ‘highest completed level of education’ and ‘employment status’. After that, participants were asked to answer how important they perceive certain variables such as ‘How important is feeling safe in your daily life for you?’. After the event, participants were asked to answer manipulation check questions (crime seriousness) like ‘To what extent did the other party mean to or intended to commit harm?’ or ‘What degree of emotional harm has this event inflicted on you?’, without knowing about the manipulation yet.

Then general victim-offender mediation was explained, and participants should have then imagined having the chance to participate voluntarily in different forms of VOM. The different VOM types were explained next, and questions were repeatedly asked after every type (face-to-face, video calling, video messaging, letter mediation, shuttle mediation), such as ‘To what degree would you be willing to participate in mediation through a face-to-face meeting with the other party?’ or ‘To what extent would you feel safe in this type of victim-offender mediation?’. Afterwards, additional questions were asked, such as ‘How important is it for you, that for this event, that you are able to feel safe when having victim-offender mediation?’, ‘How important is it for you, that for this event, that you are able to communicate fluently with the other party when having victim-offender mediation?’ and ‘How important is it for you, that for this event, that you are able to have a rich communication, in terms of body language usage and message conveyance, with the other party when having victim-offender mediation?’.

Furthermore, the participants had to answer how serious they participated in the study, write down their SONA number, if available, and give consent again. Information from participants who chose to withdraw from the study were deleted. In the end, the participants were debriefed about the study goal and the manipulation, thanked, and asked if they had any questions, want to make any suggestions, or would like to receive the research results. The study was approved by the board of ethical commission of the faculty of Behavioural, Management, and Social Sciences of the University of Twente, after considering potential threats, such as the reliving of traumatic or unpleasant experiences, and their solutions, like being warned before the study and the option to stop at any point in time without explanation.

Results

Descriptive statistics

IBM SPSS Statistics version 26 was used for the data screening and statistical analysis. To get an overview of the obtained data, descriptive statistics were examined, such as means, standard deviations, the total number of cases, and certain correlations between various variables (see Table 3).

Overall, the willingness for mediation was low across all VOM types, like video calling ($M=1.2$, $SD=1.3$), video messaging ($M=1.4$, $SD=1.6$), letter ($M=1.5$, $SD=1.2$), and shuttle ($M=1.5$, $SD=1.5$) mediation. Especially willingness to participate in face-to-face mediation had, with a large difference to the other categories, the smallest mean score ($M=0.4$, $SD=0.8$). Additionally, positive and significant correlations could be found between the willingness variables, with weak, moderate and strong correlations between $r(49) = .296$

$p = .037$ and $r(49) = .543$ $p < .000$. When individuals had a significant and positive correlation with one willingness variable, a pattern showed they also had significant and positive correlations with other willingness variables.

Perceived safety was overall low across all VOM types as well, such as video calling ($M=2.5$, $SD=1.6$), video messaging ($M=2.5$, $SD=1.7$), letter ($M=3.1$, $SD=1.4$) and shuttle ($M=2.5$, $SD=1.5$) mediation. Perceived safety in face-to-face mediation had, with a large difference to the other categories, the smallest mean score ($M=0.3$, $SD=0.8$). Additionally, positive and significant correlations could be found between the perceived safety variables, with moderate and strong correlations between $r(49) = .378$ $p = .007$ and $r(49) = .685$ $p < .000$. When individuals had a significant and positive correlation with one perceived safety variable, a pattern showed they also had significant and positive correlations with other perceived safety variables.

Harmfulness had a positive, significant and strong correlation with video messaging mediation willingness, $r(49) = .442$, $p < .001$, and a positive, significant and moderate correlation with video messaging mediation perceived as potentially safe, $r(49) = .314$, $p = .026$. Additionally, seriousness general also had a positive, significant and moderate correlation with video messaging mediation willingness, $r(49) = .324$, $p = .022$. The correlation patterns go into the expected direction, as the hypotheses, but only for video messaging mediation, not for face-to-face, video calling, letter, or shuttle mediation.

Table 3

Descriptives and Pearson correlations of perceived wrongfulness and harmfulness of the unresolved event, perceived general seriousness of the participants event, mediation willingness of face-to-face, video calling, video messaging, letter and shuttle mediation, the perceived safety of face-to-face, video calling, video messaging, letter and shuttle mediation, and the importance to communicate fluently and rich in VOM (N = 50)

Variable	<i>N</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15
1. Wrongfulness	50	2.5	1.3	-														
2. Harmfulness	50	1.8	1.1	.403**	-													
3. Seriousness_general	50	3.2	1.0	.429**	.597**	-												
4. FtF_mediation_willingness	50	0.4	0.8	-.094	.002	.067	-											
5. VideoCall_mediation_willingness	50	1.2	1.3	.120	.114	.030	.300*	-										
6. VideoMessage_mediation_willingness	50	1.4	1.6	.120	.442**	.324*	.460**	.386**	-									
7. Letter_mediation_willingness	50	1.5	1.2	-.126	.181	.027	.342*	.315*	.564**	-								
8. Shuttle_mediation_willingness	50	1.5	1.5	.207	.277	.032	.296*	.526**	.543**	.448**	-							
9. FtF_perceive_mediation_potentially_safe	50	0.3	0.8	.037	-.020	-.119	.464**	.281*	.220	.065	.251	-						
10. VideoCall_perceive_mediation_potentially_safe	50	2.5	1.6	.110	.130	-.213	.173	.639**	.274	.137	.387**	.433**	-					
11. VideoMessage_perceive_mediation_potentially_safe	50	2.5	1.7	.147	.314*	.046	.291*	.435**	.583**	.359*	.408**	.127	.568**	-				
12. Letter_perceive_mediation_potentially_safe	50	3.1	1.4	.225	.159	-.149	-.004	.361**	.158	.108	.284*	.378**	.641**	.495**	-			
13. Shuttle_perceive_mediation_potentially_safe	50	2.5	1.5	.160	.122	-.210	.278	.420**	.308*	.341	.643**	.233	.641**	.685**	.569**	-		
14. Important_to_communicate_fluently_in_VOM	50	2.6	1.7	-.174	-.104	-.220	.357*	.305*	.259	.141	.139	.322*	.341*	.367**	.274	.212	-	
15. Important_to_communicate_rich_in_VOM	50	2.6	1.6	-.068	-.006	-.185	.327*	.397**	.278	.129	.148	.225	.347*	.367**	.283*	.231	.881**	-

*. Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Hypothesis 1

In order to test the first hypothesis that ‘Victims of serious crimes prefer online (video calling and video messaging) over offline (face-to-face) and indirect (letter exchange and shuttle mediation) victim-offender mediation; this is not the case for victims of minor crimes’, a two-way mixed ANOVA was conducted. The independent variable crime seriousness (between-subjects) with the two conditions major and minor crime event is used, with the (within-subject) repeated measure variable ‘willingness to participate in VOM forms’ for the five mediation types. An interaction effect between crime seriousness and online mediation was expected.

There was a significant main effect of willingness to participate in VOM forms, $F(4, 192) = 10.86, p < .000$. The main effect indicates that overall, participants did not prefer face-to-face mediation over others. Face-to-face mediation ($M=0.4, SD=0.8$) was least preferred, as a form of VOM by the participants, in comparison to the other VOM types, like video calling mediation ($M=1.2, SD=1.3$), video messaging mediation ($M=1.4, SD=1.6$), letter mediation ($M=1.5, SD=1.2$) or shuttle mediation ($M=1.5, SD=1.5$). However, no significant main effect of crime seriousness, $F(1, 48) = 0.07, p = .792$, with the minor condition preferring mediation types other than the major condition was found. In addition, an interaction effect, as hypothesized, could not be detected, $F(4, 192) = 0.13, p = .974$, therefore the first hypothesis had to be rejected.

Hypothesis 2

To test the second hypothesis that ‘Victims of serious crimes prefer online victim-offender mediation (video calling and video messaging) because they perceive it to provide more safety than offline mediation (face-to-face); this is not the case for victims of minor crimes’, a two-way mixed ANOVA was conducted. The independent variable crime seriousness (between-subjects) with the two conditions major and minor crime event is used, with the (within-subject) repeated measure variable ‘potential safety’ for the five mediation types. An interaction effect between crime seriousness and online mediation is expected, but only in the major condition.

There was a significant main effect of perceived safety $F(4, 192) = 53.39, p < .000$, which indicated that in both conditions the participants perceived the face-to-face form of mediation as potentially less safe than other mediation forms. Face-to-face mediation ($M=0.3, SD=0.8$) was least perceived as potentially safe, as a form of VOM by the participants, in comparison to the other VOM types, like video calling mediation ($M=2.5, SD=1.6$), video messaging mediation ($M=2.5, SD=1.7$), letter mediation ($M=3.1, SD=1.4$) or shuttle

mediation ($M=2.5$, $SD=1.5$). There was however no significant main effect of crime seriousness, $F(1, 48) = 0.049$, $p = .826$, with the minor condition preferring mediation types other than the major condition. Additionally, there was no significant interaction effect between crime seriousness and potential safety, $F(4, 192) = .5$, $p = .736$, unlike hypothesized. The second hypothesis also had to be rejected.

Hypothesis 3

To test the third hypothesis that ‘Victims of serious crimes prefer online (video calling and video messaging) over indirect (letter exchange and shuttle mediation) victim-offender mediation because they perceive communication richness and fluentness to be more important than victims of minor crimes’, an independent samples t-test was conducted, to compare the importance of fluency and richness in VOM between the minor and major condition.

There was not a significant difference in the perceived importance of a fluent communication between the minor ($M=2.7$, $SD=1.5$) and the major ($M=2.4$, $SD=1.8$) condition; $t(48) = 0.67$, $p = .508$. There was also no significant difference in the perceived importance of a rich communication between the minor ($M=2.7$, $SD=1.4$) and the major ($M=2.4$, $SD=1.8$) condition; $t(48) = 0.78$, $p = .439$. Therefore, the third hypothesis had to be rejected as well.

Exploratory analysis

An additional two-way mixed ANOVA was conducted to find support, that timesaving, and money-saving might be reasons which influence the willingness of individuals to participate in different VOM forms, especially the low preference of face-to-face mediation. The independent variable crime seriousness (between-subjects) with the two conditions major and minor crime event, with the (within-subject) repeated measure variable ‘willingness to participate in VOM forms’ for the five mediation types and the two variables (covariates) money-saving and timesaving for the different VOM types will be investigated (see Appendix B). An effect between money-saving and timesaving with the willingness to participate in different VOM forms was expected.

There was a significant main effect of money-saving in VOM forms, $F(4, 192) = 27.34$, $p < .000$. The main effect indicates that overall, participants did not perceive face-to-face mediation as more money-saving. Instead, face-to-face mediation ($M=0.4$, $SD=0.7$) was perceived as least money-saving, by the participants, in comparison to the other VOM types, like video calling mediation ($M=1.9$, $SD=1.4$), video messaging mediation ($M=1.8$, $SD=1.6$), letter mediation ($M=2.3$, $SD=1.4$) or shuttle mediation ($M=1.6$, $SD=1.4$).

There was also a significant main effect of timesaving in VOM forms, $F(4, 192) = 15.18, p < .000$. The main effect indicates that overall, participants did not perceive face-to-face mediation as more timesaving. Face-to-face mediation ($M=0.4, SD=0.8$) was least perceived as timesaving by the participants, in comparison to the other VOM types, like video calling mediation ($M=1.9, SD=1.5$), video messaging mediation ($M=1.7, SD=1.6$), letter mediation ($M=1.8, SD=1.3$) or shuttle mediation ($M=1.3, SD=1.4$).¹

Discussion

The main goal of this research was to examine whether crime seriousness influences the choice of individuals to participate in different communication forms of VOM, considering their perceived feeling of safety and the importance of communication fluency and richness. It was expected that participants that remembered a more serious, unresolved event would prefer online (video calling and video messaging) over offline (face-to-face) and indirect (letter exchange and shuttle mediation) victim-offender mediation. They were expected to prefer it because online VOM should have been perceived as safer than offline mediation. Also, they should have preferred online over indirect mediation because it provides more communication richness and fluentness, and the participants with more serious, unresolved events should have perceived this as more important than the participants with less serious, unresolved events. A combined effect of crime seriousness and the willingness to engage, the perception of potential safety and the perceived importance of communication richness and fluentness in different forms of VOM could thus not be detected. The results of the present study do not provide support for any of the hypotheses. All three hypotheses had to be rejected.

Instead, an effect of mediation preference could be detected, which did indicate that overall, participants did prefer online (video messaging, video calling) and indirect (letter and shuttle mediation) VOM over offline face-to-face VOM. Another effect could be found in perceived safety, which indicated that in both conditions the participants perceived online (video messaging, video calling) and indirect (letter and shuttle mediation) VOM as potentially safer than offline face-to-face VOM. Overall, face-to-face mediation was perceived as least preferred in willingness to participate and perceived safety in different VOM forms. In addition, the positive relationship between reported harmfulness of the

¹ The variable 'who described the event' (this event happened to me; this event happened to someone else; I imagined this event happening to me) did not have an effect on the participants willingness to participate in different forms of VOM, their perceived feelings of safety or the importance of communication fluency and richness.

unresolved event on the one hand and video messaging willingness to participate and perceived safety in video messaging on the other, as well as between general seriousness and video messaging willingness to participate provides partial and indirect support for our expectations. Even though no interaction effect was determined, a positive and significant correlation pattern was found, that goes into the expected direction as the hypotheses. This was, however, only the case for video messaging mediation, not for face-to-face, video calling, letter, or shuttle mediation.

This pattern of results is not consistent with the previous literature. Face-to-face mediation held in general a low interest in this study, although it often has the most positive outcomes in other studies. Sherman et al. (2015) observed effects such as a reduction in reoffending for violent offenses that tend to be quite large, indicating that especially face-to-face VOM, as well as other VOM forms, might be effective for serious offenses. Zebel et al. (2017) and Wyrick and Costanzo (1999) argued that programs such as VOM might indeed be well suited for serious crimes. Nugent et al. (2001) additionally found that many crime victims, including those of violent crimes, voiced interest in and the need for broader mediation programs. Reasons for the results in this study might be that the participants perceived face-to-face mediation as too unsafe and uncertain. If they went through some serious crime event, they might feel too afraid to meet their offender face-to-face, in fear of becoming a victim again. They might have a distorted image of VOM because the information given in this study might not have been comprehensible or detailed enough, or it might have been too difficult to estimate how VOM would be. Furthermore, some participants might not have understood the explanations sufficiently enough to know how exactly VOM operates or what it contains. There might even be participants who did not read the complete information presented, misunderstood them, and consequently answered the questionnaire not correctly, with all the information necessary.

Exploratory analysis findings indicated that participants might have chosen offline and indirect mediation forms over face-to-face mediation because face-to-face mediation was seen as the most expensive and time-consuming VOM form. The other forms were seen as similarly money and timesaving. Thus, aside from perceived safety, time and money considerations might also be reasons for the low preference of face-to-face mediation. Reasons could include that individuals might think two parties talking to each other might cost more time than just leaving a video message or writing a letter. Additionally, they might think that meeting somewhere in person, with several individuals included in the process, is generally more expensive than just writing a letter and exchanging it.

Strength

The study had a number of strong points that are worth mentioning. Starting with the findings in this study, a correlation could be observed which indicated that greater harmfulness is associated with greater willingness to participate in video message VOM. Another correlation also indicated that greater harmfulness is associated with perceiving video messaging VOM as safer. Participants did prefer some forms of mediation over others and perceived some forms of mediation as potentially safer than others, those results might open the possibility for future research. Video call mediation, video messaging, letter and shuttle mediation showed a pattern of being preferred over face-to-face mediation, by participants. The present results of harmfulness reliability and the indicated general seriousness of participants in the study are consistent with Warr's (1989) work. Their research showed that people generally agree on interpretations of seriousness of a crime, as they did in this study, it could be explained through at least the harmfulness dimension. Zebel et al. (2017) also found that perceived harmfulness was a predictor, significantly and positively, especially for victims' willingness to participate in VOM over time.

Limitations

The current study also displayed some limitations, which could be addressed in possible future follow-up studies. One limitation concerned the small sample, 27 participants had to be removed from the study due to missing data, which left a sample consisting of 50 participants for two conditions. Most of those participants stopped the study when they had to think about an event, which might indicate that this was too difficult for them or the time that reading and answering required might have been too great. Additionally, a selection bias might have been present, most individuals participated through the test subject pool BMS and were probably students from the University of Twente, which might have influenced the sample (volunteer bias). This might have affected the expressiveness of the sample, students are part of the population of interest, but due to their high participation, they might have distorted the results. A more diverse sample could lead to new and differentiated information and insights because different groups might have different experiences in regard to serious and personal events or VOM (Winship & Mare, 1992). Furthermore, a wide range of information was presented throughout the study, difficulties such as remembering the information might have occurred and distorted the results (recall bias). In future research, shorter explanations, closed instead of open questions, or an offer for a prize or win might reduce the drop-out rate in future qualitative studies (Frick et al., 1999; Nederhof, 1983).

Another limitation might have been the serious dimension wrongfulness. Only two items were used to assess this dimension, which displayed small correlations. More items could be added to make wrongfulness a complete scale and give participants a better insight and understanding of this dimension. In addition, a small willingness to participate in VOM, in general, was found in this study. Reasons for that might have been the explanations and the understanding of participants, the information provided might not have been clear, detailed, or simple enough for the participants to understand VOM and the different mediation types sufficiently. Additionally, the events participants imagined, might have been less serious and less recent, thus do not require VOM anymore. Victims of less serious offenses (e.g. property offences) are often less willing to participate in mediation after some time has passed, between the crime and the referral to VOM (Wyrick & Costanzo, 1999). Furthermore, the events that the participants remembered might have already been resolved, for the participants personally (without them indicating so), or they might have given up on finding a resolution of the conflict and thinking about it would be too tiresome for them. The participants that did indicate interest in VOM were then probably victims of more serious offenses (e.g. personal crimes), because they are often more willing to participate in mediation, especially after some time has passed between the crime and referral (Wyrick & Costanzo, 1999; Zebel et al., 2017).

Future implications

Reasons for the non-significant results might be related to the event, possible explanations or reasons could include that the imagined events were not recent, actual, important, or pressing enough for the participants to feel the need for VOM. Several personal events and situations concerning other people, described by the participants, displayed incomplete information, which led to uncertainty if the events were recent, pressing, or important enough, as they were asked to remember. This could be addressed in future research, to gain a better insight into participants choice of mediation participation. To avoid uncertainty more specific and closed questions could be asked about the event, to obtain greater, more detailed, and complete information, or an extra question could be asked about the personal, perceived importance of the individuals' event. Another focus for future research could be that instead of crime seriousness being the driving force, the event type or other variables could also influence participants choice to participate in VOM.

Furthermore, it can be difficult for individuals to imagine personal and harmful events, and afterwards additionally having to imagine VOM. To improve participants understanding of such mediations virtual reality (VR) could be applied. Placing individuals into different

settings of VOM could help them to experience a real feeling and immerse themselves completely and comfortably in the situation, without distractions. Moreover, the individuals are in a safe space without having the risk of getting hurt by an offender or being revictimized (Bloch, 2021). Different offender and victim types (e.g. burglars, men, women, children, adults), and participants reactions to them could be investigated. Thus, VOM might be able to become more adjustable to individual preferences.

In addition, VOM locations, such as community centres and police stations, or different VOM types, like face-to-face or letter mediation, could be displayed through VR. To investigate the impact of different settings on participants, several other places could additionally be tested with VR for VOM. Some participants might not feel comfortable at police stations, they could even become more stressed, cancel VOM or reject it altogether, because of the setting. More personal and comfortable settings, like living rooms or gardens, could be tested as future VOM settings, through VR. Any type of location can be chosen, which reflects great geographic flexibility, and the environment can also be controlled and measured in VR (Bloch, 2021).

Conclusion

Despite the limitations and non-significant results, this research can be seen as the first step toward integrating two lines of research, crime seriousness and individuals' choice of participating in online and offline victim-offender mediation forms, that, to the available knowledge, have not been directly linked yet. Furthermore, with the attention again centered on the main results that were found in this study, it can be said that the positive and significant association patterns between reported harmfulness of the unresolved event with video messaging willingness to participate and perceived safety in video messaging, as well as between general seriousness and video messaging willingness to participate, do provide partial and indirect support for our expectations. The associations went into the expected directions as the hypotheses, but only for video messaging mediation, not for the other mediation forms. Which could also indicate that video messaging mediation might have some unexplored advantages for participation in VOM. Overall, the more serious and harmful, an event was perceived; the more willingness to participate in different forms of VOM was indicated, and perceived safety is also more important for those who think about more harmful events.

Future research will be needed to find out more about the relationship between those variables. Even though this study displayed a small participation rates in VOM, especially in face-to-face mediation, regardless of other research displaying positive results involving it,

this study leaves a lot of room for improvement, as also mentioned above. All three hypotheses had to be rejected because no interaction effects could be found. This might raise the question if the study can be replicated and improved to still be able to find interaction effects of crime seriousness with the willingness to participate in different VOM forms, perceived safety in different VOM forms or perceived importance of communication fluentness and richness. The explanations of the two conditions and the five VOM types might have to be explained briefer but more specific, to avoid losing participants due to spending too much effort on the study or misunderstanding the provided information. Furthermore, closed and specific questions could be asked, instead of open ones, to take the workload from participants and gain more detailed information about them, without gaps. Additionally, VR might also be a possible asset for future studies, due to its safety, generalizability, and flexibility, to investigate VOM types, settings, and potentially even victim or offender types. Future research might be able to increase the participation rate in VOM in the course of time, when the different VOM types and the participants events are better coordinated with each other. Further studies are necessary to gain more knowledge about the VOM types and their dynamics with variables, such as crime seriousness, and participants needs for restorative justice.

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Appendix A
Questionnaire (Draft)

Crime seriousness and victim-offender mediation

Survey Flow

<p>Block: Introduction and Consent (2 Questions)</p> <p>Standard: Demographics (5 Questions)</p> <p>Standard: Perceived Importance (1 Question)</p>
<p>BlockRandomizer: 1 - Evenly Present Elements</p>
<p>Block: Crime event minor (8 Questions)</p> <p>Block: Crime event major (8 Questions)</p>
<p>Standard: Manipulation check (1 Question)</p> <p>Standard: Explantation for VOM forms (1 Question)</p>
<p>BlockRandomizer: 5 - Evenly Present Elements</p>
<p>Standard: Face-to-Face (3 Questions)</p> <p>Standard: Video calling (3 Questions)</p> <p>Standard: Video messaging (3 Questions)</p> <p>Standard: Letter exchange (3 Questions)</p> <p>Standard: Shuttle mediation (3 Questions)</p>
<p>Standard: Additional questions (1 Question)</p> <p>Standard: Ending (7 Questions)</p>
<p>EndSurvey:</p>
<p>EmbeddedData</p> <p>Q_TotalDurationValue will be set from Panel or URL.</p>

Start of Block: Introduction and Consent

Q1 Welcome dear respondent,

Thank you for choosing to participate in this study, which is part of my Bachelor thesis at the University of Twente. This study deals with Victim-Offender Mediation (VOM) programs that give conflicting parties the opportunity to engage in a guided, mediated conversation to discuss how the crime has affected their lives. Within this study, you will be asked to remember and describe, as vividly as possible, an unresolved situation, in which you got hurt, and then later will be asked to imagine the possibility of Victim-Offender Mediation for this situation. It will take you about 10 to 15 minutes to complete this Questionnaire. You are free to leave at any point in time, without explanation or justification. There are no right or wrong answers. Your data is treated anonymously and is used only for the purpose of this study. Your data will be only saved if you press the finish button at the end. If you have any questions, feel free to contact me: K.Kahl@student.utwente.nl
I appreciate your effort and thank you in advance!
Katharina

Please read the following consent carefully.

If you have any questions or remarks about the study, feel free to contact me.

I read and understood the previous information and agree that my data will be used anonymously for scientific purposes only. I agree to take part in this study on a voluntary basis and I am aware that I can stop at any point in time, without an explanation or justification. I want to continue with the study.

- Yes, I agree. (1)
- No, I do not agree. (2)

Q2 Please keep in mind that you need to give your consent at the end of the questionnaire again, to complete it.

End of Block: Introduction and Consent

Start of Block: Demographics

Q3 We would first like to ask you a number of questions about your demographic information:

What is your gender?

- Male (1)
- Female (2)
- Other (3)
-

Q4 What is your nationality?

- Dutch (1)
- German (2)
- Other: (3) _____
-

Q5 What is your age?

Q6 What is your highest completed level of education?

- Primary education (1)
- Secondary education (2)
- Bachelor's degree (3)
- Master's degree (4)
- other, namely: (5) _____
-

Q7 What's your employment status?

Student (please specify your discipline): (1)

employed (full or part-time) (2)

unemployed (3)

retired (4)

self-employed (5)

other (please specify): (6) _____

End of Block: Demographics

Start of Block: Perceived Importance

Q8 Please answer the following questions:

	0 (1)	1 (2)	2 (3)	3 (4)	4 (5)
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> How important is feeling safe, in your daily life, for you? (1)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> How important is a fluent communication, with other people, in your daily life, for you? (2)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> How important is a rich communication (in terms of seeing and using body language or communicating feelings, needs and intent), with other people, in your daily life, for you? (3)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

End of Block: Perceived Importance

Start of Block: Crime event minor

Q9 Dear participant,

please read the following information carefully: Imagine now, as vividly as possible (you can also close your eyes), a personal unresolved event that you experienced throughout your life where you felt like another person put you in a situation where you felt mildly unpleasant, offended and/or insulted. This event should not have had any major, severe or fierce harm on you, but it should have had longer lasting consequences, and concern criminal or punishable behaviour of the other person. It should however still be unresolved today and have left you with something you would like to express or share.

Use the following questions as guidance to describe the situation and its circumstances, in which you got hurt mildly, as precise as possible (three to four sentences). This description is important: you will be asked questions about it later. Your description will be processed anonymously and the information you share in the scenarios will not be published.

If you do not remember or never experienced a mildly hurtful event, think about an event that happened to someone close to you or try to imagine such an event happening to you.

Q10 Describe the event that led to the hurtful situation:

Q11 Did this event happen to you or someone else?

- This event happened to me (1)
 - This event happened to someone else (2)
 - I imagined this event happening to me (3)
-

Q15 How serious do you consider the harm that was inflicted upon you or someone else by your/their unresolved event?

	0 (1)	1 (2)	2 (3)	3 (4)	4 (5)
Seriousness (1)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Q12 What exactly did or said the other person that made you or someone else feel hurt?

Q13 Describe, as accurately as possible, how you or someone else felt when you/they were hurt by the other person:

Q14 What happened after you or someone else were hurt?

Q16 Timing

First Click (1)

Last Click (2)

Page Submit (3)

Click Count (4)

End of Block: Crime event minor

Start of Block: Crime event major

Q17 Dear participant,

please read the following information carefully: Imagine now, as vividly as possible (you can also close your eyes), a serious personal event throughout your life, where you experienced high levels of emotional and/or physical harm, by another person. This event should have had longer lasting consequences, and concern criminal or punishable behaviour of the other person. It should still be unresolved today and have left you with something you would like to express or share.

Use the following questions as guidance to describe the situation and its circumstances, in which you got hurt severely, as precise as possible (three to four sentences). This description is important: you will be asked questions about it later. Your description will be processed anonymously and the information you share in the scenarios will not be published.

If you do not remember or never experienced a serious harmful event yourself, think about an event that happened to someone close to you or try to imagine such an event happening to you.

Q18 Describe the event that led to the serious, hurtful situation:

Q19 Did this event happen to you or someone else?

- This event happened to me (1)
- This event happened to someone else (2)
- I imagined this event happening to me (3)

Q23 How serious do you consider the harm that was inflicted upon you or someone else by your/their unresolved event?

	0 (1)	1 (2)	2 (3)	3 (4)	4 (5)
Seriousness (1)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Q20 What exactly did or said the other person that made you or someone else feel hurt seriously?

Q21 Describe, as accurately as possible, how you or someone else felt when you/they were hurt seriously by the other person:

Q22 What happened after you or someone else were hurt seriously?

Q24 Timing
 First Click (1)
 Last Click (2)
 Page Submit (3)
 Click Count (4)

End of Block: Crime event major

Start of Block: Manipulation check

Q25 Please answer now the following questions:

	0 (1)	1 (2)	2 (3)	3 (4)	4 (5)
To what extent do you consider the event that you just described as morally reprehensible? (1)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
To what extent do you think (did) the other party intended to commit harm? (2)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
To what extent has this event hurt you emotionally? (3)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
To what degree did you suffer physical damage as a result of the event? (4)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
To what extent were you harmed materially as a result of the event (for example damage to your property)? (5)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

End of Block: Manipulation check

Start of Block: Explantation for VOM forms

Q26 After thinking about the described situation, imagine that the other party struggles after the event as well, this other party approaches a mediator at a victim-offender mediation agency, and requests to have mediation with you. After that a mediator approaches you and explains the situation, they ask you if you would like to voluntarily participate in victim-offender mediation. If you agree to participate, you would first meet the mediator alone and have the chance to express your expectations and feelings about the meeting and the other party. The mediator would then explain to you what to expect and how the meeting (with you, the other party and the mediator) would proceed: “During the mediated contact you will have the opportunity to learn about the motives of the other party, ask questions, share your experience and how you are impacted by the incident”. Such meetings often help parties to find closure and cope better with the incident.

There are different forms of VOM available, each type has a different structure. They will be further explained on the next pages. Please click now to the next page and answer the following questions.

End of Block: Explantation for VOM forms

Start of Block: Face-to-Face

Q27 Face-to-Face victim-offender mediation is a direct mediation form in which the two parties (victim and offender) meet up face to face in a facility (such as a community centre or a police station, etc.) with a mediator. Before the face-to-face mediation can proceed, the mediator has to prepare both parties separately prior the meeting. During this preparation phase, the expectations and wishes of each party are identified and coordinated to each other. The mediator explains to the victim what is going to happen and what to expect, for example that they are able to ask questions about the event to cope better with it or that they might get an apology or acknowledgment of their experience and feelings, but that the meeting is not about punishing the offender. The mediator additionally, ensures that the mediation is emotionally and physically safe. The mediator also explains the procedure to the offender, that they can apologise, explain the situation from their point of view or ask and answer questions. After the preparations a meeting is scheduled, in this meeting both parties are brought into a room together with a mediator (which guides and overlooks the conversation) to talk about the event and its consequences. The participants share their narratives and listen to each other. After the meeting, the mediator checks in with them to see how both parties are doing.

Q28 Please answer now the following questions, regarding this mediation type:

	0 (1)	1 (2)	2 (3)	3 (4)	4 (5)
To what extent would you be willing to have mediation with the other party through this type of communication? (1)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
To what extent would you perceive this type of victim-offender mediation potentially safe? (4)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
To what extent would you perceive this type of victim-offender mediation potentially money-saving? (2)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
To what extent would you perceive this type of victim-offender mediation potentially timesaving? (3)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Q29 If you wish to add or explain any information, regarding your responses, you can do so below:

End of Block: Face-to-Face

Start of Block: Video calling

Q30 Video calling is an online victim-offender mediation form, often programs such as Skype or Zoom can be used. Webcams and microphones are available, so that both parties can see and talk to each other. Before the mediation, the mediator prepares both parties separately prior the meeting. During this preparation phase, the expectations and wishes of each party are identified and coordinated to each other. The mediator explains to the victim what is going to happen and what to expect, for example that they are able to ask questions about the event to cope better with it or that they might get an apology or acknowledgment of their experience and feelings, but that the meeting is not about punishing the offender. The mediator also explains the procedure to the offender, that they can apologise, explain the situation from their point of view or ask and answer questions. During the video calling session, the victim, offender and mediator will go to an institution (such as a community centre or a police station, etc.) where they are placed in different rooms in front of a computer (they will not meet in person). The participants should be able to feel comfortable and safe. A mediator is present to guide and overlook the conversation. Both parties can now share their thoughts and emotions about the incident. After the meeting the mediator checks up on the participants to ask how they are doing and how they experienced the mediation and its process.

Q31 Please answer now the following questions, regarding this mediation type:

	0 (1)	1 (2)	2 (3)	3 (4)	4 (5)
To what extent would you be willing to have mediation with the other party through this type of communication? (1)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
To what extent would you perceive this type of victim-offender mediation potentially safe? (4)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
To what extent would you perceive this type of victim-offender mediation potentially money-saving? (2)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
To what extent would you perceive this type of victim-offender mediation potentially timesaving? (3)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Q32 If you wish to add or explain any information, regarding your responses, you can do so bellow:

End of Block: Video calling

Start of Block: Video messaging

Q33 Video messaging is a form of online victim-offender mediation, where the victim and offender go separately to an institution (such as a community centre or a police station, etc.), there they are able to record video messages via, for example, a video camera. Before the mediation, the mediator prepares both parties separately prior the message recording. During this preparation phase, the expectations and wishes of each party are identified and coordinated to each other. The mediator explains to the victim and the offender what is going to happen and what to expect. Both parties are able to record their thoughts and emotions about the incident or apologise, but the meeting (video message exchange) is not about punishing the offender. Those videos are then exchanged and given by the mediator to the other party. Both parties do not meet each other directly, they only meet separately with the mediator, which is present during the recording and watching of the videos, to answer questions and overlook the recording. After the video recording and exchange, the mediator checks up on the participants to ask how they are doing and how they experienced the mediation and its process.

Q34 Please answer now the following questions, regarding this mediation type:

	0 (1)	1 (2)	2 (3)	3 (4)	4 (5)
To what extent would you be willing to have mediation with the other party through this type of communication? (1)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
To what extent would you perceive this type of victim-offender mediation potentially safe? (4)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
To what extent would you perceive this type of victim-offender mediation potentially money-saving? (2)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
To what extent would you perceive this type of victim-offender mediation potentially timesaving? (3)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Q35 If you wish to add or explain any information, regarding your responses, you can do so bellow:

End of Block: Video messaging

Start of Block: Letter exchange

Q36 Letter exchange is an indirect form of victim offender mediation, where the participants go separately to an institution (such as a community centre or a police station, etc.), here they are able to write a letter to the other party, which is then exchanged by the mediator. Before the mediation, the mediator prepares both parties separately prior the letter writing and exchange. During this preparation phase, the expectations and wishes of each party are identified and coordinated to each other. The mediator explains to the victim and offender what is going to happen and what to expect. Both parties are able to write down their thoughts and emotions about the incident or apologise, but the meeting (letter exchange) is not about punishing the offender. Those letters are then exchanged and given by the mediator to the other party. Both parties do not meet each other directly, they only meet separately with the mediator, which is present during the writing and exchange of the letters, to answer questions and overlook the situation. After the letter writing and exchange, the mediator checks up on the participants to ask how they are doing and how they experienced the mediation and its process.

Q37 Please answer now the following questions, regarding this mediation type:

	0 (1)	1 (2)	2 (3)	3 (4)	4 (5)
To what extent would you be willing to have mediation with the other party through this type of communication? (1)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
To what extent would you perceive this type of victim-offender mediation potentially safe? (4)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
To what extent would you perceive this type of victim-offender mediation potentially money-saving? (2)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
To what extent would you perceive this type of victim-offender mediation potentially timesaving? (3)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Q38 If you wish to add or explain any information, regarding your responses, you can do so bellow:

End of Block: Letter exchange

Start of Block: Shuttle mediation

Q39 Shuttle mediation is an indirect form of victim-offender mediation, where the participants go separately to an institution (such as a community centre or a police station, etc.), for a conversation. Before the mediation, the mediator prepares both parties separately prior the shuttle mediation. During this preparation phase, the expectations and wishes of each party are identified and coordinated to each other. The mediator explains to the victim and offender what is going to happen and what to expect. Both parties are able to explain their thoughts and emotions about the incident or apologise, but the meeting (shuttle mediation) is not about punishing the offender. During the shuttle mediation the victim and offender do not meet each other directly, the mediator communicates and explains the messages in both directions, between both parties, back and forth, until both sides have nothing more to say or ask. The mediator is present to answer questions, overlook the situation and exchange what the parties say. After the shuttle mediation, the mediator checks up on the participants to ask how they are doing and how they experienced the mediation and its process.

Q40 Please answer now the following questions, regarding this mediation type:

	0 (1)	1 (2)	2 (3)	3 (4)	4 (5)
To what extent would you be willing to have mediation with the other party through this type of communication? (1)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
To what extent would you perceive this type of victim-offender mediation potentially safe? (4)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
To what extent would you perceive this type of victim-offender mediation potentially money-saving? (2)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
To what extent would you perceive this type of victim-offender mediation potentially timesaving? (3)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Q41 If you wish to add or explain any information, regarding your responses, you can do so bellow:

End of Block: Shuttle mediation

Start of Block: Additional questions

Q42 Please answer a few additional questions about how you perceive having mediation in general (regardless of the communication type), in regards to the event you described with the other party.

	0 (1)	1 (2)	2 (6)	3 (7)	4 (8)
How important is it for you, that for this event, that you are able to feel safe when having victim-offender mediation? (1)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
How important is it for you, that for this event, that you are able to communicate fluently with the other party when having victim-offender mediation? (2)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
How important is it for you, that for this event, that you are able to have a rich communication, in terms of body language usage and message conveyance, with the other party when having victim-offender mediation? (3)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

End of Block: Additional questions

Start of Block: Ending

Q43 You finished the main part of the questionnaire.
Please answer a few FOLLOW UP QUESTIONS now to finish the study.

Q44 To what extent did you participate seriously in this questionnaire?

	0 (1)	1 (2)	2 (3)	3 (4)	4 (5)
1 (1)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Q47 This study aims to examine the relationship between crime seriousness and the preference for online mediation (such as video calling or video messaging) in opposition to offline (face-to-face) and indirect (letter exchange or shuttle mediation) mediation. VOM in serious crimes represent an especially demanding challenge, because of the severe harm inflicted on the victim. Therefore, practitioners’ debate and test how different variables like crime seriousness might influence the victim’s motivation to participate in different VOMs, by using digital means of communication. For this purpose, participants were randomly allocated to one of two conditions, major and minor crime seriousness. The expected goal of the study is to find a positive relationship between crime seriousness and a preference for online over offline and indirect VOM. You can still stop this experiment (at any time, without explanation or justification), if you wish to do so.

Q48 Please make sure to confirm your consent again, or withdraw it, below (in case of withdrawing, your data will be deleted).

- I confirm my consent. (1)
- I withdraw my consent. (2)

Q45 If applicable: Did you enroll via UT SONA systems and would like to grant study credits for participation? Please indicate then your SONA number in the text box below:

Q46 Please indicate if you have any remarks, comments or questions in the text box below (optionally).

Q49 Thank you very much for taking your time to participate!

If you have any further questions concerning the research or are curious about the results, do not hesitate to write me: K.Kahl@student.utwente.nl.

Please do not share this information with other possible participants. Kind regards and have a nice day!

Goodbye

End of Block: Ending

Appendix B

Exploratory analysis

The variables money-saving and timesaving, in the exploratory analysis, were additionally used to explain the outcomes from hypothesis one. They could be analysed due to the questions ‘To what extent would you perceive this type of victim-offender mediation potentially money-saving?’ and ‘To what extent would you perceive this type of victim-offender mediation potentially timesaving?’ from the questionnaire (see Appendix A). To control for any perceived differences, the participants were beforehand informed about the degree of effort and investment, which was the same in every VOM form, as they were told.