

Prisoner Social Networks: Patterns Observed in Longitudinal Visitation Data

Motivation

- Prison is a “policy-built” environment
- Visitation viewed as beneficial by academics (Cochran & Mears, 2013) and administrators
- 29 U.S. jurisdictions promote visitation by policy
 - Yet, most jurisdictions exclude some types of visitors (Boudin et al., 2014)
- Little research on how composition of visitors may impact outcomes, yet theory suggests that:
 1. Parents and older relatives may provide prosocial influence (Hirschi, 1969) and access to resources (instrumental support, Lin, 1986)
 2. Spouses and children may provide emotional support and opportunities for practicing alternate roles (expressive support, Lin, 1986)
 3. Friends may be positive or negative influences (differential association, Sutherland & Cressey, 1966)
 4. Larger, more diverse networks should lead to better outcomes (Song et al., 2011)

Sample Selection & Method

NYS DOCCS	Female	Male
New Court Admissions 2000-2013	14,877	190,833
Served 720+ days	3,995 (27%)	82,766 (43%)
Received 1+ visits in 720 days	3,154 (79%)	56,882 (69%)
Sample for LCA modeling*	2,091 (66%)	40,539 (71%)

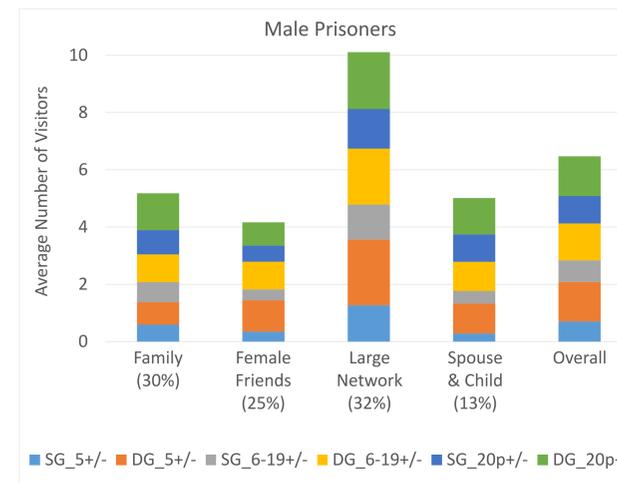
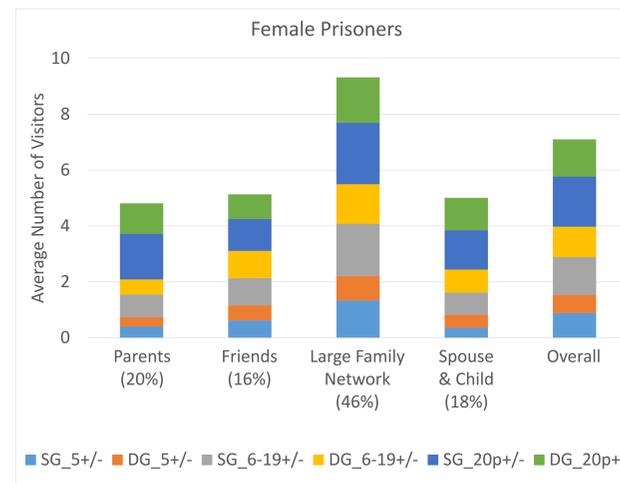
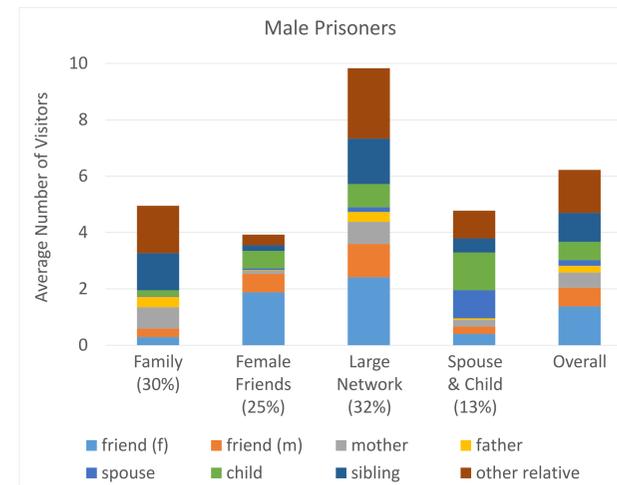
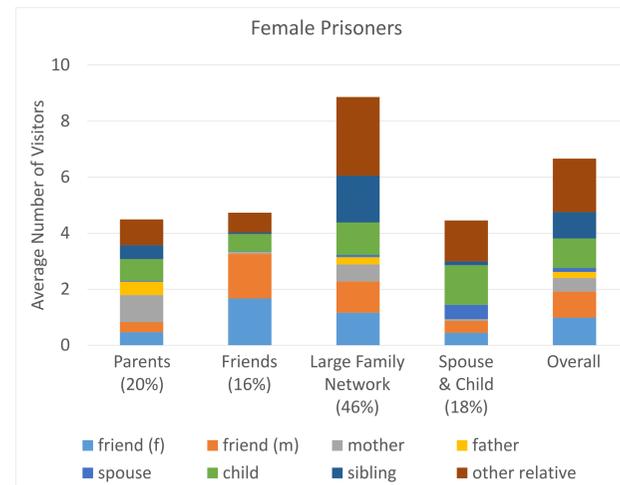
*Sample was restricted to middle distributions of visit counts to aid in model convergence:

- females with 5-78 visits in 720 days
- males with 4-80 visits in 720 days
- Latent Class Analysis (LCA) is used to identify clusters of prisoners who are similar on prisoner-visitor networks from within the heterogeneous distribution (Muthén, 2002).
- Posterior probabilities of each individual being in a class are estimated using Bayesian techniques (Lanza et al., 2007)
- 4-group models were best fit for females and males, with adequate fit statistics (Nagin, 2005) and robustness to multiple start values

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What prisoner-visitor social network patterns emerge from visit data?



Note: SG: Same Gender as prisoner; DG: Different Gender; Numbers are visitor age differences from prisoner's age at intake in years; 20p=20 plus years

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Disclaimer: The data from the New York State Division of Criminal Justice Services (DCJS) is provided in the interest of information exchange. The opinions, findings, and conclusions expressed in this publication are those of the author and not those of DCJS. Neither New York State nor DCJS assumes liability for its contents or use thereof.

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Are network patterns related to post-release recidivism?

	No Controls Odds Ratio (SE)	Full Controls ¹ Odds Ratio (SE)
Female Prisoners		
LCA Probabilities (Large Family Network ref.)		
Parents	0.951 (.292)	0.851 (.299)
Friends	1.608 (.407)*	1.393 (.414)
Spouse & Child	1.022 (.261)	0.802 (.246)
Network Measures		
% homophilous	1.022 (.437)	1.210 (.571)
% family	0.639 (.142)**	0.713 (.178)

Male Prisoners		
LCA Probabilities (Large Network ref.)		
Family	1.026 (.049)	0.931 (.055)
Female Friends	1.164 (.053)***	0.948 (.053)
Spouse & Child	0.938 (.050)	1.015 (.070)
Network Measures		
% homophilous	0.784 (.073)***	1.031 (.107)
% family	0.842 (.037)***	0.966 (.047)

*p < .10, ** p<.05, ***p<.01

¹Includes demographics, criminal record, prison classification and treatment needs at intake

Conclusion and Policy Implications

- Prisoners who receive visits often have relatively large and varied networks
- Networks are largely comprised of family members
- Networks contain few demographically homophilous members
- No evidence that certain network patterns are more beneficial (or harmful) for post-release recidivism
- Policies to restrict visitation to narrow visitor groups are *not* supported by these data
 - E.g., recent Mississippi DOC policy change below, currently postponed indefinitely (Thompson, 2016)

DATE: August 31, 2016
RE: Change in Visitation Policy

Effective September 1, 2016, visitors will be of immediate family as defined by MDOC. Also, Offenders will be limited to ten (10) persons of immediate family as defined by MDOC on their visitation list at any one time.

MDOC has defined immediate family as: a spouse, children, stepchildren raised prior to age 12, brothers, sisters, parents, grandparents, grandchildren, or person documented as acting in place of parent as surrogate prior to age 12 (i.e., foster parent, stepparent, or relative who raised the individual as a child) and can be documented by law enforcement, school, Human Services records, or employer statement.

This excludes ALL friends, pastors, girlfriends, fiancés, cousins, nephews, nieces, aunts, uncles, in-laws and anyone else that is not listed above.

MT/jw