Prisoner Social Networks: Patterns Observed in Longitudinal Visitation Data

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What prisoner-visitor social network patterns emerge from visit 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%)

Acknowledgements: The empirical analysis in this study was made possible by a partnership between the New York State Department of Corrections and Community Supervision (DOCCS) and the New York State Division of Criminal Justice Services (DCJS). The author would like to thank the staff at both DOCCS and DCJS for their assistance.

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)

Are network patterns related to post-release recidivism?

- 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 Network ref.)
    - Family 1.026 (.049) 0.931 (.055)
    - 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

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

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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