

Breaches in the Wall - Imprisonment, Social Support, and Recidivism

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Abstract

Objectives: Drawing on theories that emphasize the salience of social ties, this study examines the different kinds of experiences prisoners have with visitation and the implications of those experiences for behavior after release.

Method: This study uses data from a release cohort of prisoners to (1) explore how visitation experiences unfold for different cohorts of individuals serving different amounts of time in prison and to (2) test the effects of longitudinal visitation patterns on recidivism.

Results: Findings suggest that individuals who maintain connections with their social networks outside of prison have lower rates of reoffending and that the timing and consistency with which visitation occurs also affect criminal behavior. Specifically, prisoners who are visited early and who experience a sustained pattern of visitation are less likely to recidivate.

Conclusion: These findings underscore the importance of social ties for understanding the prisoner experience and its implications for offending. More research is needed that seeks to explain the effects identified here and that explores, using nuanced approaches, other prison experiences, and the implications of those experiences.