



The effect of prison visitation on reentry success: A meta-analysis



Meghan M. Mitchell ^{*}, Kallee Spooner, Di Jia, Yan Zhang

Sam Houston State University, Department of Criminal Justice and Criminology, P.O. Box 2296, Huntsville, TX 77341, USA

ARTICLE INFO

Article history:

Received 25 May 2016

Received in revised form 25 July 2016

Accepted 26 July 2016

Available online xxxx

Keywords:

Meta-analysis
Prison visitation
Recidivism
Social bonds

ABSTRACT

Purpose: High rates of recidivism among released prisoners have prompted policymakers and practitioners to explore novel solutions. Although visitation has been a facet of routine prison operations for decades, studies of this policy have produced mixed results. Therefore, this article systematically evaluates the effect of prison visits on recidivism.

Methods: Relying on meta-analysis techniques put forth by the Campbell Collaboration, 16 studies were assessed to determine the overall mean effect of visitation on recidivism and important moderator effects on this relationship.

Results: Experiencing visitation resulted in a 26% decrease in recidivism. This effect was largest for male samples (53% reduction), those who had experienced conjugal and furlough visits (36% decline), and when using multiple measures of recidivism (56% decrease). Finally, the effect of visitation was strongest (53% decrease) for limited follow-up periods (≤ 1 year).

Conclusions: Overall, results indicate that prison visitation generates modest reductions in post-release offending, which is moderated by gender, visitation type, time at risk, and recidivism measures. In light of these findings, policy implications are put forth to make visitation more accessible to all inmates.

© 2016 Elsevier Ltd. All rights reserved.

1. Introduction

Over 2.2 million adults were incarcerated in prisons and jails across the United States at yearend 2014 (Kaeble, Glaze, Tsoutis, & Minton, 2015). The overwhelming majority of those individuals will be released at some point in their lifetime (Hughes & Wilson, 2002; Jonson & Cullen, 2015), and within three years after their release, nearly half will return to prison (Durose, Cooper, & Snyder, 2014). These alarming statistics demonstrate the limited ability of correctional institutions to meaningfully reduce recidivism (Cullen, Jonson, & Nagin, 2011) and the need for strategies to break the cycle of incarceration by promoting successful offender reintegration into law-abiding society. The complex processes of prisoner reentry make these goals difficult to achieve.

Serving time in prison interrupts an individual's community ties, family relationships, employment opportunities, and other social investments, which can make it difficult for offenders to reestablish themselves in the community upon release (La Vigne, Cowan, & Brazzell, 2006; Mears & Cochran, 2015). Visitation in prison provides an opportunity to sustain connections with family, community, and social supports (La Vigne, Naser, Brooks, & Castro, 2005). Strong social networks may provide protective mechanisms that function to prevent criminal relapse after release from incarceration (Bales & Mears, 2008; Barrick, Lattimore, & Visher, 2014; Derksen, Gobeil, & Gileno, 2009).

The importance of prison visitation has been recognized by scholars and prison administrators for decades (Creasia Finney Hairston, 1988; Mears, Cochran, Siennick, & Bales, 2012). Some researchers have found that visits during imprisonment were associated with decreased offending in institutional and community settings (Cochran, 2012; Day, 2010; Jiang & Winfree, 2006; Siennick, Mears, & Bales, 2013), whereas other studies have reported null or iatrogenic effects of visitation with children on subsequent conduct (Benning & Lahm, 2014; Casey-Acevedo, Bakken, & Karle, 2004). Despite inconsistent findings when evaluating the effect of visitation on behaviors, a comprehensive analysis has not occurred. Therefore, this study uses meta-analysis techniques to systematically evaluate the mean effect size of prison visitation on recidivism.

1.1. Visitation in prison

Several theoretical perspectives may account for the relationship between prison visitation and reduced recidivism. For example, under the social bond perspective, prison visits can maintain or strengthen positive social bonds (Bales & Mears, 2008; Barrick et al., 2014; Derksen et al., 2009; Hirschi, 1969; Hirschi & Stark, 1969; Laub & Sampson, 2003; Maruna & Toch, 2005), which may function as controls to prevent criminal behavior during and after incarceration (Mears et al., 2012; Sampson & Laub, 1993). Through enhanced social support, prison visitation may also contribute to the development of a prosocial, rather than criminal, identity that may facilitate desistance from crime, which is consistent with the tenets of labeling theory (Chiricos, Barrick, Bales, &

^{*} Corresponding author.

E-mail address: meghan.mitchell@shsu.edu (M.M. Mitchell).

Bontrager, 2007; Maruna, 2001; Mears et al., 2012; Paternoster & Iovanni, 1989). In accordance with strain theory, face-to-face contact may help offenders cope with strain resulting from feelings of loss, anger, or frustration in prison and after release (Adams, 1992; Agnew, 2006; Bales & Mears, 2008; Berg & Huebner, 2011; Listwan, Sullivan, Agnew, Cullen, & Colvin, 2013). Maintaining or establishing ties through visitation may assist prisoners in accessing resources necessary for re-entry, such as employment, behavioral health and substance abuse treatment, housing opportunities and programs, social welfare services, and transportation assistance (Berg & Huebner, 2011; Cochran & Mears, 2013; Mears & Cochran, 2015). In fact, many offenders rely heavily on social networks for support immediately after release prior to obtaining jobs or public assistance (Harding, Wyse, Dobson, & Morenoff, 2014; Martinez, 2006; Petersilia, 2003). Under the risk-needs-responsivity model of offender rehabilitation (Andrews & Bonta, 2010), addressing offenders' need for association with anti-criminal others through visitation in prison could produce subsequent reductions in the criminogenic risk of antisocial relationships, contributing to an overall decrease in recidivism propensity.

Although the benefits of visitation have been theoretically and empirically established, studies of prison visits in various states have consistently reported that less than half of prisoners receive visits (Derksen et al., 2009; Duwe & Clark, 2013; Mears et al., 2012). Limited access to visitation is attributable to a number of factors. One, long travel distances—visitors might have to miss work, secure childcare, and pay transportation and lodging costs (Christian, 2005; Cochran, Mears, Bales, & Stewart, 2015). Two, policies—visitors must be familiar with the prison's procedures and rules regarding fees (e.g., for processing background checks), security and searches, proper attire, visitor restrictions (e.g., no criminal record), and visiting hours (Arditti, 2003; Austin & Hardyman, 2004; Boudin, Stutz, & Littman, 2013; Cochran & Mears, 2013). Three, amenities—prisons may have insufficient amenities (e.g., no privacy or contact, not child-friendly) and an intimidating environment (Arditti, 2003; Pierce, 2015). Fourth and finally, inmate behaviors—visitation privileges are based on good behavior while incarcerated (Boudin et al., 2013). Fifth and finally, strained relationships—potential visitors may be dissuaded from seeing prisoners if the antisocial behaviors that led to imprisonment have eroded their trust or confidence in the offender (Christian & Kennedy, 2011; Comfort, 2008).

1.2. Effect of visitation on behavior

Despite limited access to visitation, some studies have found visitation reduced misconduct within correctional facilities (Cochran, 2012; Day, 2010; Jiang & Winfree, 2006; Siennick et al., 2013), whereas other research has reported that visitation increased institutional rule infractions (Benning & Lahm, 2014; Casey-Acevedo et al., 2004). Although very few studies have assessed the impact of visitation, the extant literature suggests that prison visits could possibly benefit offenders in successful reintegration into positive societal and familial roles (e.g., Bales & Mears, 2008; Barrick et al., 2014; Derksen et al., 2009; Duwe & Clark, 2012; Duwe & Johnson, 2016; Mears et al., 2012). For example, with a sample of 16,420 prisoners released in Minnesota (Duwe & Clark, 2013) determined that visitation while imprisoned resulted in a 13% decrease in the hazard of reconviction during follow-up periods ranging from 2.5 to 6.5 years. Examining 7000 offenders in Florida, Bales and Mears (2008) reported that visits during the year prior to reentry were associated with a 31% decrease in the odds of recidivism within two years in the community. Another Florida study of 11,395 released prisoners found that compared to offenders who did not receive visits, those who were visited either at the beginning or consistently throughout the term of incarceration were less likely to recidivate after reentry (Cochran, 2014). Conversely, in an evaluation of 6537 Canadian federal offenders, (Derksen et al., 2009) reported no statistically significant relationship between prison visits

from non-spouses occurring one year prior to release and reoffending in the community within two years after release. When recidivism was operationalized as a combination of new offense or technical violation, however, more visits were associated with a decreased risk in reincarceration (Derksen et al., 2009). Qualitative reviews of the visitation–recidivism literature have explored this nuanced relationship (e.g., De Claire & Dixon, 2015; Creasie F. Hairston, 1991), but there has yet to be a comprehensive analysis that determines the overall effect of prison visitation on reoffending post-release.

1.3. The current study

Research has shown that visitation in prison is associated with reduced likelihood of criminal relapse in the community, but the overall effect of this intervention across studies varies and has not been systematically evaluated. Therefore, the purpose of this study is to systematically calculate the mean effect size of prison visitation on recidivism by conducting a meta-analysis.

2. Methods

A meta-analysis is a statistical approach that can systematically synthesize empirical results of research findings from a series of studies based on identified criteria. The basic assumption of a meta-analysis is that a true common effect exists behind studies examining the same concepts. Statistical measures stipulated in advance determine the assigned weight of each study. The weighted average and errors can be generated to estimate the unknown true common effect. Though objectiveness cannot be guaranteed, meta-analyses have been well recognized as providing a “transparent, objective, and replicable framework” for systematic and quantitative reviews (Borenstein, Hedges, Higgins, & Rothstein, 2009, p. xxiii). In the present study, general methodology guidelines of meta-analysis put forth by the Campbell Collaboration are adopted (for review see Campbell Collaboration, n.d.).

2.1. Inclusion criteria

To determine the overall effect of visitation on recidivism and to better inform policies related to prison administration and reentry success, several criteria were used to gather eligible studies. First, the target population was limited to adults who had been released from correctional facilities. Second, the treatment examined was narrowed to visitation, excluding other forms of contact (e.g., phone calls); however, solely isolating the effect of visitation from any other prison program is challenging to decipher because many inmates participate in programming and treatment while incarcerated (Cullen & Jonson, 2011; Glaze & Maruschak, 2008; Lawrence, Mears, Dubin, & Travis, 2002).¹ Third, the study design was restricted to classical or quasi-experimental designs due to the isolation of visitation through either randomization or controlled comparison groups. Fourth, the outcome variable needed to measure “recidivism” as indicated by arrest, conviction, or incarceration. Fifth, searches were limited to published journal articles, books, dissertations, and technical reports. Sixth, eligible studies had to provide the common statistics or raw data necessary for the calculation of effect sizes.² Seventh, searches were limited to the English language; however, the location expands beyond the United States. Eighth and finally, to reduce biases related to time frames, no restrictions were set for publication years.

2.2. Strategies for searching the literature

Systematic methods were used to conduct an exhaustive selection of articles while avoiding bias. First, several prevalent online database were selected. Those included CJ Abstracts, ProQuest Criminal Justice, PsychInfo, SocIndex, JSTOR, Google Scholar, National Criminal Justice

Download English Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/en/article/882610>

Download Persian Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/article/882610>

[Daneshyari.com](https://daneshyari.com)