



Reducing Recidivism with Social Capital

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Abstract

The cycle of incarceration within the United States is prominent for both men and women offenders—many former offenders recidivate within three to five years of reintegrating into society. Previous research has examined how social capital is a contributor to having a successful reentry. On the other hand, most research solely samples male offenders—leaving a gap in the literature that discusses the experience of justice-involved women on specific contributors to their attainment or failure of reintegration. The present study aimed to examine the effects of social capital on recidivism among justice-involved women. The results indicated that criminality of friends and employment and financial problems increased the risk for a number of new felony convictions and new misdemeanor charges. Ultimately, the key practice implication of the current study is assessing justice-involved women's risk and needs and providing them with an effective treatment plan that will equip them to sustain their integration.

Introduction

Significance of Study

- Two out of three former prisoners recidivate within three to five years of their release.
- Recidivism happens for various reasons; much can be directly connected to the lack of release preparation and minimal resources they receive upon their release.
- Social capital can provide significant advantages to former prisoners—including emotional and social support, caregiving, and the resources that can come from these relationships.

Purpose of Research

- This study aims to examine the effects of social capital on recidivism among justice-involved women.

Research Question

- What is the effect of social capital on recidivism among justice-involved women?

Research Hypothesis

- The more social capital justice-involved women have access to, the higher their success in reintegrating into society.

Literature Review

Theoretical Framework

Social Capital Theory: There are various types of social capital within this theory that can be influential to this specific population.

- Bonding social capital can be defined as ties among people who are very close and known to each other while exhibiting similar personal characteristics—like family, friends, and even neighbors.
- Linking social capital takes a deeper look into the community, as this involves networks and ties to states or other agencies in their community—this ultimately helping with employment, housing stability, and receiving public assistance
- The strength of ties, defined as having connections with others, directly affects recidivism

Social Capital Factors

- Social capital can come at different levels—macro and micro—both levels ultimately providing various levels of benefits—ranging from social support to resources that provide them with further stability to stray away from poverty, homelessness, and a new conviction

Literature Review (Cont.)

Factors Affecting Recidivism

- Previous research examined diverse risk factors affecting recidivism and reoffending—where many of the common factors are poverty, housing instability, and lack of state-sponsored support.

Knowledge Gaps

- There is a significant gap on studies that solely represent the reintegration process for a justice-involved woman, despite how this population can be significantly affected by the barriers reintegration poses.
- There is a lack of direct knowledge of key contributing factors that increases or decreases the possibility of recidivism for justice-involved women.

Methods

Research Design and Data Collection Procedures

- The current study is a secondary analysis of the data from Probation/Parole Officer Interactions with Women Offenders, Michigan 2011-2014 by Merry Morash, Sandi W. Smith, Deborah A. Kashy, and Jennifer E. Cobbina (2018).
- This longitudinal study provided a scope on justice-involved women in Michigan from the moment they were recruited to twenty-four months from the beginning of their supervision with their parole officer.
- In-person, individual interviews and surveys were completed with participants throughout the course of the study where the justice-involved women had measurement points at two to three months after, five months, eight months, and lastly twenty-four months.

Sample and Sampling Method

- The sample was recruited through their probation/parole agents—as the agents facilitated the recruiting of the study.
- The 402 women offenders who met criteria for the study were released from prison with the majority being on probation ($n = 305$), while the others were on parole ($n = 93$) or both ($n = 4$).
- In the current study, the original sample of 402 offenders was utilized. This was the case as all 402 participants engaged in the aspects associated with the secondary analysis—being offenders and answering questions pertaining to social capital.

Measures

Independent Variable: *Social Capital*

- Family support (6-point Likert scale)
- Supportive relationships (Y/N)
- Friendships (Y/N)
- Employment/financial problem (9-point Likert scale)
- Housing stability (Y/N)
- Public assistance benefits needed (7-point Likert scale)
- Crime and drugs in neighborhood (8-point Likert scale)

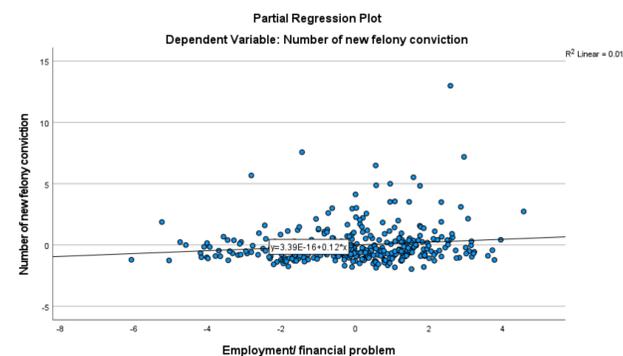
Dependent Variable: *Recidivism*

- Months since last conviction (96-point Likert scale)
- Number of new felony convictions (15-point Likert scale)
- Number of new misdemeanor convictions (38-point Likert scale)

Results

Analysis of Number of New Felony Convictions

- A multiple linear regression was performed to predict a study's participant's number of new felony convictions based on family support, supportive relationships, supportive friends, criminality of friends, employment/financial problems, housing stability, number of public assistance benefits needed but not received, crime and drugs in neighborhood, and age.
- Participant's criminality of friends **significantly and positively** predicted the number of new felony convictions of the participants
- Participant's employment and financial problems **significantly and positively** predicted new felony convictions among the participants



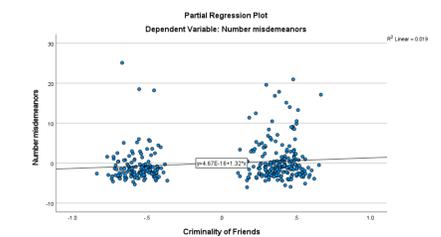
Variable	ANOVA	R ²	B	SE	Beta	t	Sig.
Number of New Felony Convictions	F(9,324) = 3.812, p < .001	.096					
Constant			-1.605	.581	-.000	-2.763	.006
Family Support			.064	.059	.059	1.080	.281
Supportive Relationships			.122	.217	.031	.563	.573
Supportive Friends			.473	.241	.108	1.962	.051
Criminality of Friends			.372	.182	.110	2.042	.042
Employment/ Financial Problem			.117	.047	.144	2.464	.014
Housing Stability			-.316	.245	-.072	-1.287	.199
Number of public assistance benefits needed but not received			-.019	.062	-.018	-.314	.753
Crime and drugs in Neighborhood			.070	.041	.096	1.705	.089
Age			.029	.009	.179	3.315	.001

Results (Cont.)

Analysis of Number of Misdemeanors

- Criminality of friends **significantly and positively** predicted the number of misdemeanors of the participant.

Variable	ANOVA	R ²	B	SE	Beta	t	Sig.
Number Misdemeanors	F(9,314) = 2.851, p = .003	.076					
Constant			1.127	1.730	-.000	.652	.515
Family Support			-.114	.176	-.036	-.649	.517
Supportive Relationships			-.962	.650	-.083	-1.480	.140
Supportive Friends			-.210	.703	-.017	-.299	.765
Criminality of Friends			1.324	.539	.137	2.454	.015
Employment/ Financial Problem			.246	.140	.106	1.759	.079
Housing Stability			-.690	.734	-.054	-.940	.348
Number of public assistance benefits needed but not received			.265	.183	.084	1.448	.149
Crime and drugs in Neighborhood			-.158	.122	-.076	-1.303	.194
Age			.052	.026	.113	2.034	.043



Analysis of Months Since Last Conviction

- **None** of the social capital factors significantly predicted the effects for the participants' months since last convictions.

Discussion

Implications and Future Research

- Social workers who work with justice-involved women can now assess the risk factors of friends' criminality and employment and financial problems. It provides them with insight into the client's potential in recidivating.
- Future research should help identify other vital contributors that lead to a successful reintegration or act as potential risk factors.

Strengths and Limitations

- Strengths include: narrowing a literature gap associated with women offenders being represented across studies and examining gender-specific social capital contributors that influence recidivism—criminal friends and employment and financial problems
- Limitations include: Having a small sample size that solely encompassed a small region of the United States and relying on the sample's self-report

Acknowledgment

I would like to dedicate this to my parents—Veronica and Lazaro, grandparents, family, friends, and boyfriend. This journey would not have been attainable without all your unconditional love, support, and sacrifices. Every single one of you kept me motivated these past two years and I hope I have made you all proud. To my little cousins—Abigail, Ebony, Alyssa, Dahlia, and Olivia—and niece—Vivianna—I hope I have inspired you to follow your passion and achieve the goals you set your mind to. I may have been the first to obtain my Masters, but I will not be the last. Los quiero mucho, xoxo.