

Social Support, Gender, and Inmate Adjustment to Prison Life

Insights From a National Sample

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Although living in prison is difficult for all inmates, anecdotal evidence and a small number of qualitative studies on women's prisons suggest that females have greater social support needs while incarcerated. This claim is important for a more complete understanding of adjustment to prisons. In particular, extra- and intrainstitutional social support mechanisms may reduce the inmate-perceived stresses associated with imprisonment and yield fewer official rule infractions. Using a multilevel analysis, the authors explore ties between social support mechanisms and reported rules infractions of a nationally representative sample of male and female state prison inmates. Findings suggest that female inmates experienced more social support than did their male counterparts. Some of the included social support mechanisms seem to affect inmates' adjustment to prison, and the effect of marital status on misconduct varies by gender. The implications of these findings for understanding prison life and for prison administrators are also examined.

Keywords: *social support; gender; inmate; multilevel analysis*

On any given day, state and federal prisons in the United States hold more than 1.4 million inmates, of which roughly 101,179 are women (Bureau of Justice Statistics, 2005). However, we know very little about how women respond to incarceration, especially the nature and extent of their

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institutional-based rule violations. Women prisoners simply do not get the same attention as do men from criminologists, penologists, or policy makers (Craddock, 1996b; Harris, 1993; Owen, 1998; Pollock, 2002; cf. Greer, 2000).

In spite of this dearth of gender-specific research on inmate adjustments to incarceration, extant studies of male inmates suggest that insights may lie within inmate socialization and related social support mechanisms. Prison inmates exhibit a unique form of adult socialization, called prisonization by Clemmer (1958), whereby they “take on in greater or less degree the folkways, mores, customs, and general culture of the penitentiary” (p. 299). Moreover, a key part of any prisonization study since the middle of the 20th century has been the types of social support imported into the prison or emergent from the deprivations of prison life (Clemmer, 1958; Irwin & Cressey, 1962; Sykes & Messinger, 1960; Thomas, 1970). For example, positive social (prosocial) support mechanisms contribute to the smooth operation of the correctional facility and, furthermore, should portend well for ex-offenders as they reenter the society at large. Conversely, negative social (antisocial) support mechanisms, such as the inmate social system and its negativistic inmate code, may propagate criminal orientations and outlooks with origins in both the prison and the free society and ultimately bode ill for a successful return to life outside the correctional facility.

Quantitative research that explores both the institutional and individual levels of prison misconduct has been rare until very recently, and even these recent additions to the literature have ignored social support variables (Camp, Gaes, Langan, & Saylor, 2003; Huebner, 2003; Wooldredge, Griffin, & Pratt, 2001). Moreover, there are hundreds of studies about inmates’ adjustment, several of which compare incarcerated male and female inmates (Craddock, 1996b; Harris, 1993; Hart, 1995; Zingraff, 1980). In spite of this growing body of literature, little attention has been paid to the gendered effects of social support on inmate behavior. In statistical terms, omitting important variables from a model can lead to biased and inconsistent estimators (Wooldridge, 2000).

The current study examines social support, gender, and inmate adjustment to prison as measured by monthly rule violations. It tests whether social support levels and the effect of social support on inmates’ adjustment vary by gender, contributing a comparative analysis largely absent in the prison literature. Although qualitative researchers—especially those examining indi-

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vidual, prison-specific studies—suggest that men and women respond differently to the deprivations of prison, comparative research such as the present study, with a nationally representative sample of prisons, should add to the knowledge base we possess about how men and women respond to the pains of imprisonment. In furtherance of this goal, we turn next to a review of the links between social support and inmate adjustment to prison.

Why Study Social Support for Prison Inmates?

The possible effect of extra- and intrainstitutional prosocial support mechanisms on the responses of male and female inmates to incarceration is important for many reasons. First, whatever their source, social support mechanisms can help inmates meet their personal needs or situate themselves with a modicum of safety and security in the inmate society. For example, an inmate's participation in prison education programs, including basic literacy, can reduce idle time and improve self-esteem. Moreover, participants report such programs also provide safe havens inside prison, enhance their ability to deal with an often hostile prison environment, and enrich the quality of day-to-day life (Fagan, 1989; Ryan & McCabe, 1994). The prosocial support derived from prison-based educational programming apparently leads to fewer prison rule violations (Gaes & McGuire, 1985; McCorkle, Miethe, & Drass, 1995; see also Adams et al., 1994).

Second, prosocial support mechanisms—but particularly those originating outside the prison—may ameliorate a constellation of negative intrainstitutional forces collectively called the “pains of imprisonment” (Sykes, 1958) and subsequently reduce the occurrence of official rule violations in prison (Gordon, 1999; Toch & Adams, 1989). As Carlson and Cervera (1992) reported, inmate participants in family reunion programs enjoyed the visits, felt a part of their own families, and expressed closer ties to family members. These elevated prosocial feelings may improve the inmates' self-esteem and may make their full indoctrination into the inmate subculture less likely. The positive outcomes reported by family reunion program participants include lower numbers of rule violations than nonparticipants (Howser, Grossman, & MacDonald, 1983; Howser & MacDonald, 1982).

Within the past decade, criminologists have begun to address the theoretical roots of social support. Pratt and Godsey (2003) maintain that besides Cullen's (1994) pioneering work on social support, this perspective also has conceptual ties to popular theories such as reintegrative shaming, social capital, institutional anomie theory, and social altruism. All deal with “the com-

mon proposition that social aggregates—from communities to nations—vary in their degree of cohesiveness, support, shared values, and willingness to come to the aid of those in need” (Pratt & Godsey, 2003, p. 613). In the prison context, social support may strengthen inmate family ties (Howser et al., 1983; Howser & MacDonald, 1982), and strong family ties can foster both general prosocial behavior (Wright, Cullen, & Miller, 2001) and higher proinstitutional—or at least lower levels of antiinstitutional—behavior (Hensley, Rutland, & Gray-Ray, 2000).

In conclusion, scholars long have noted that the effect of positive social support mechanisms varied by gender (Hart, 1995; Owen, 1998, pp. 2-3; Pollock, 2002, p. 129; Ward & Kassebaum, 1965; Zingraff, 1980). Furthermore, the extant research tends to support the position that female prisoners require more social support originating within and outside prisons than do their male counterparts (Pollock, 2002; Ward & Kassebaum, 1965). We turn next to the gender–social support nexus and its possible effect on inmate adjustments to prison.

Gender and Social Support

We contend that a wide-ranging definition of the loci of social support provides a more complete understanding of the putative differences in the social support levels observed for or reported by male and female prison inmates. Prison inmates—male or female—do not begin their incarceration *tabula rasa*. They are the products of prior socialization processes, some involving contacts with other parts of the criminal justice system. Such contacts facilitate prisonization. Indeed, this theoretical argument is the basis of the importation perspective on prisonization, wherein the culture of the prison-inmate society is seen as largely brought into the prison from the streets (Irwin & Cressey, 1962; Thomas, 1970).

Prison, Gender, and Social Support

Researchers have reported differences in the child-rearing patterns of men and women bound for prison. According to Datesman and Cales (1983), in most instances the female prisoners’ dependent children were not living with their fathers prior to incarceration (see also McGowan & Blumenthal, 1978). In 1997, only about 4 in 10 male parents in state prisons lived with their children prior to incarceration, contrasted with nearly two thirds of female parents in state prisons (Bureau of Justice Statistics, 2000). It is usually the case that prior to incarceration, women are more closely linked to the care and

upbringing of children than are men (Ward & Kassebaum, 1965; see also Bureau of Justice Statistics, 2000).

As suggested by the importation model's supporters, gender-based differences also should be brought into the prison and further shape inmates' values, subcultures, and behaviors (Giallambardo, 1966; Heffernan, 1972; Owen, 1998; Pollock, 2002; Ward & Kassebaum, 1965). But men and women bring qualitatively different life experiences into prison, differences that may be categorized into several key clusters. For instance, female prisoners' values are generally quite traditional, for as a group they are family centered, children centered, or relationship oriented (Harris, 1993). Ward and Kassebaum (1965, p. 17) observed that 4 in 10 female prisoners at Frontera, California, indicated that missing their home and family was the most difficult aspect of adjustment to prison life, a percentage that was higher than that for any other answer. More than a generation later, Owen (1998) found that most of the women interviewed at the Central California Women's Facility held quite traditional views of gender roles. They saw themselves as wives and mothers; moreover, relationships with children were central to the lives of many of them.

Male and female inmates also behave in different ways as they establish relationships within correctional facilities. These male and female responses to incarceration can be categorized into two central types of relationships: relationships with other inmates and relationships with family (especially children) outside of prison. With regard to relationships with other inmates, men concentrate on doing their own time, being tough, and relying on their feelings of inner strength and their abilities to withstand outside pressures to get themselves through their time in prison. By contrast, women remain interwoven into the extrainstitutional lives of their significant others, primarily their children and their own mothers (Datesman & Cales, 1983; Lord, 1995; Owen, 1998; Sykes, 1958; Ward & Kassebaum, 1965). Within the prison walls, women's lives featured personalized relationships that are organized around small, intimate, family-like groups (Owen, 1998; Ward & Kassebaum, 1965).

These qualitative differences have implications for the female inmates' institutional adjustment. For example, studying two gender-specific juvenile correctional facilities, Zingraff (1980) found that for female inmates, the greater the priority of interpersonal ties within the institution, the lower the prisonization levels. This relationship did not exist for male inmates. Recent studies, however, have revealed that female inmates' interpersonal relationships may be less stable and less familial than in the past (Greer, 2000; Kruttschnitt, Gartner, & Miller, 2000). Many women choose to isolate themselves from others as the best way to do their time.

Family, Friends, and Institutional Adjustment

One of the most important differences between incarcerated men and women is the preeminent role of children in female prisoners' lives (McGowan & Blumenthal, 1978; Pollock, 2002). The prison experience often is described as more painful for women than for men because it cuts off ties to family and loved ones, especially children (Jones, 1993; Ward & Kassebaum, 1965). Although incarcerated men seem to "cut loose" from family ties with few negative consequences, the women in Owen's (1998) study tried to maintain these ties in various ways. For many incarcerated women, reuniting with their children becomes a primary goal and acts as an informal social control during their prison time. In fact, women in prison tend to report higher social support levels, identified as close or meaningful friendships with other prisoners and outsiders (Hart, 1995). Indeed, women report more frequent outside communication with family members than do men (Goetting & Howsen, 1983; Pollock, 2002).

Our understanding of these differences may be linked to gender-based elements of their respective ties to families and friends. First, more female inmates have children than do their male counterparts (Pollock, 2002). Second, father-children relationships and mother-children relationships are substantially different from each other. Compared to only 3 in 10 men, nearly twice as many—6 in 10—women retained legal custody. More than 7 in 10 of the women expected to be consulted over decision making related to the child, contrasted with only half of the men (Koban, 1983; Pollock, 2002). Nearly 9 in 10 fathers in state prison said that at least one of their children now lived with the mother; only about one fourth of mothers said the father was the child's current caregiver (Bureau of Justice Statistics, 2000).

Incarcerated fathers rarely exhibit concern about their children's fate. They know that in most cases the mothers or other family members will take care of the children while they are in prison, no matter how long the sentence. Women, by comparison, have no such assurances and may be all too aware that their children are being neglected emotionally and starting on the path to behavioral problems (Dodge & Pogrebin, 2001). The psychological harm of knowing that the children have been removed by welfare agencies, then, is a burden that women tend to carry much more often and more intensely than do men (DeKeseredy & Schwartz, 1996; Pogrebin & Dodge, 2001; Ward & Kassebaum, 1965). As a consequence, imprisoning a mother is much more likely to break up the basic family unit than is incarcerating a father (Pollock, 2002).

Finally, visitation patterns are also different for male and female prisoners. As Pollock (2002) observed: "Visitation rooms in women's prisons are

mostly filled with family members (typically mothers and sisters) and children; visitation rooms in men's prisons are usually filled with wives and girlfriends" (p. 111). This is not to say that children are absent from the visiting rooms of men's prisons; however, children are far more commonly found in the visitation rooms of women's prisons (Owen, 1998; Pollock, 2002).

According to Owen (1998), "The world of women's prison was quite different than that of the male culture; prison culture among women was tied to gender role expectation of sexuality and family" (p. 4). Since the classic studies of women's prisons conducted by Ward and Kassebaum (1965), Giallambardo (1966), and Heffernan (1972), "much of women's prison culture has changed little" (Owen, 1998, p. 4). Our aim is to add a quantitative dimension to this window on the female prison inmates' world and provide a statistical comparison with their male counterparts.

Hypotheses and Analytic Strategies

Social support has at least two dimensions: support structure and support process (Cullen, 1994). Support structure refers to the embedded location of support resources within the social structure, such as community, social networks, and intimate relationships (Lin, Ye, & Ensel, 1997). Support process refers to the mechanisms by which support resources are recognized and used by individuals to meet their individual needs (Lin et al., 1997). Social support also may be either formal or informal. According to Cullen (1994), informal support might be provided through social connections with others who do not have any official status with or connection to the individual. Formal support refers to the support provided by criminal justice systems, schools, and other governmental assistance programs. When discussing people's behavior within an organization, social support consists of internal and external social support. Internal social support includes informal and formal support from inside an organization. External social support refers to informal and formal support from outside an organization.

In recognition of these distinctions, we employed two levels of variables, one reflecting individual-level factors, the second exploring institutional-level factors. Both types of variables are included in each gender-based model. For example, each model includes five external support variables at the inmate (or individual) level and two support variables at the prison (or institutional) level. The five support variables at the inmate level are three process variables—calls, mail, and visitation—and two resource variables—marital status and number of children. At the prison level, support variables include one formal support process from prison—prison programs in

which inmates participate—and one informal support within prison—inmate-organized groups or clubs in which inmates participate.

Previous researchers have suggested that females need and have greater social support at the inmate level (Hart, 1995). Consistent with this argument, we expect a higher level of social support among females. In addition, based on social support theory, we expect all of the included social support variables to help reduce inmate rule violations. Finally, the effect of social support on inmate prison adjustment—especially with respect to getting into trouble with prison authorities—may be gendered as well (Hart, 1995; Zingraff, 1980).¹ As a corollary, we expect the effect of social support on inmate misconduct to vary by gender.

Inmate rule violations usually exist as multilevel count data. Ordinary least squares estimations or pooled regression estimates often are used to study rule violations; however, these methods may be inappropriate (Jiang, 2005; Osgood, 2000; Wooldredge et al., 2001). A Poisson-based hierarchical linear model is the preferred method for such data (Long, 1997, chap. 8; Raudenbush & Bryk, 2002, chap. 10). Thus, our study overcomes the limitations of previous research in two main ways. First, we include social support factors in exploring inmate misconduct. In fact, we examine the effects of the individual- and prison-level social support variables on inmate misconduct simultaneously, using the most appropriate analytic technique, hierarchical generalized linear modeling (HGLM). Second, the data are from a nationwide study, the Survey of Inmates in State and Federal Correctional Facilities in the United States, 1997 (SISCF), enhancing our ability to generalize from the findings.

Data and Measurement

Data Collection and Sample Design²

Census Bureau researchers selected the inmate sample for the 1997 SISCF from a universe of 1,409 state prisons.³ The sample design for the SISCF survey was a stratified, two-stage selection. The first stage separated all correctional facilities into two sampling frames: one for male inmate prisons and one for female inmate prisons. Prisons holding males and females were included on both lists and treated independently in sample selections based on their population of male or female prisoners as relevant. The state prison universe included 1,131 prisons with male inmates only, 131 with female inmates only, and 147 with both males and females. Overall, 280 state prisons were selected for the sample; however, two female inmate facilities

had closed before interviewing, and three female inmate facilities refused to participate. As a result, 275 state prisons, including 220 male inmate prisons and 55 female inmate prisons, participated in the survey.

At the second stage, U.S. Census Bureau interviewers randomly selected each institutional sample by systematically sampling a list provided by the facility of all inmates using a bed on the previous night. In the SISCF, 12,269 males and 3,116 females were sampled. A total of 1,100 inmates in the state survey refused to participate, resulting in 7.2% second stage nonresponse among state inmates. As a result, the state survey included more than 14,000 completed interviews.

Dependent Variable

The study's dependent variable, rule violations per month for each inmate since admission to prison, was a composite and count variable. Two steps were used to form the variable. First, we summarized all of the rule violations from the 13 types included in the 1997 state inmate survey, including drug or alcohol violations, assaults against staff and other inmates, attempted escape, and other major and minor violations. Next, we divided the summation by time served to date of interview to obtain a rate.

Independent Variables:

Level 1 (Inmate Level)

The level 1 or inmate-level social supports are both external and informal variables. Social support mechanisms may derive from family members outside the prison and include support structures or resources and support processes. In our study, outside prison support resources include marital status at interview (married = 1, not married = 0) and the number of children (yes = 1, no = 0). The outside prison support process includes calls made or received from children (yes = 1, no = 0), mail sent or received from children (yes = 1, no = 0), and visits by children (yes = 1, no = 0).

Control Variables:

Level 1 (Inmate Level)

We included five control variables at the inmate level: age at interview, race, crime history, length of sentence, and drug-use history. Each of these controls has a specific rationale for inclusion. For example, age has a well-demonstrated negative link to rule violations for reasons that include the behavioral consequences of misconduct for older inmates, loss of nerve,

maturation, and the association of age with prosocial commitment (Flanagan, 1980; MacKenzie, 1987). Age at interview was measured in years. The research on the links between race and rule violation is not well developed; however, race is clearly a dimension of prison unrest (Irwin & Austin, 1993; Jacobs, 1977; Pollock, 2004). In the 1997 SISCF, race included categories of White, Black or African American, Asian and Pacific Islander, American Indian, and Other; however, our study only examined Black (0) and White (1) prison inmates.

A key institutional-level variable is institutional security level. This institutional feature has a clear link to prison violence (Berk, Ladd, Garziano, & Baek, 2003; Craddock, 1996a; Van Voorhis & Presser, 2001), and as a consequence, factors associated with prison classification systems must be statistically controlled. We identified three such variables in the SISCF survey. For example, crime history is an important element in any security classification system (Harer & Steffensmeier, 1996). The number of prior sentences to probation or incarceration provided a measure of crime history. The categories for this variable are no prior sentence (0), 1 prior sentence (1), 2 prior sentences (2), 3 to 5 prior sentences (3), 6 to 10 prior sentences (4), and 11 or more prior sentences (5). For its part, an inmate's sentence seems associated with rule violations in a unique fashion: Long-term inmates appear to realize more fully the need to coexist with correctional authorities, whereas the short-term inmates include many youngsters whose minds remain in the street (Flanagan, 1980; Johnson, 2002). Sentence length generally was reported in years but also included other sentence categories such as life, life plus additional years, life without parole, and death. Our computation of length of sentence excluded non-numerical categories. Drug-use history, too, is important to a complete understanding of prison security and rule violations, even if the ties are mixed (Jiang, 2005). We measured drug-use history by regular poly drug use prior to incarceration. This variable is the summation of types of drugs an inmate had ever used regularly before his or her incarceration. The original question asked was, "Have you ever used (heroin) once a week or more for at least a month?" The same question was used to ask the inmates about the following 12 types of drugs: other opiates, methamphetamine such as ice or crank, other amphetamines, methaqualone such as Quaaludes, barbiturates, tranquilizers such as Valium, crack, cocaine, PCP, LSD or other hallucinogens, marijuana or hashish, and other drugs. Other drugs include any drugs not mentioned above. The alpha coefficient for this variable was .78.⁴

**Independent Variables:
Level 2 (Institutional Level)**

The level 2 or prison-level variables also included both informal and formal social support variables and non-social support variables. Informal support within prison refers to support from inmate-organized groups or clubs in a prison. We measured this variable by summing each inmate's participation in the following groups or clubs: (a) a Bible club or other religious groups; (b) other religious activities; (c) prisoner assistance groups or prisoner counseling groups; (d) other prisoner self-help or personal improvement groups such as lifer groups, veteran clubs, parent awareness groups; (e) drug or alcohol groups; and (f) ethnic/racial organizations. If an inmate participated in one of the six categories above, then it was scored 1; if he or she was in two, then that person was scored 2; and so on. The score range for the variable is from 0 to 6.

Formal social support at the institutional level refers to support within the inmate's prison. It includes support resources and support process. Formal support process within prison was the summation of prison programs an inmate had ever participated in since his or her admission to the current prison. The programs provided by a prison were (a) vocational or job training programs, (b) other educational programs, (c) classes in life skills, (d) prerelease programs, (e) outside community activities, and (f) classes doing arts and crafts. The scoring system and score range for this variable are the same as for informal support within prison.

**Control Variables:
Level 2 (Institutional Level)**

Other control variables at the prison level include prison size, security level, mean age, and racial composition. As with the inmate-level variables, these were selected for specific reasons. For example, prison size has been shown to be inversely related to rule violations (Huebner, 2003). In the present research, prison size was measured by final population count on sampling day. As previously mentioned, it is widely believed and empirically verified that the higher the security level, the higher the deprivations and the higher the rule violations (see discussion of individual-level control variables; Cao, Zhao, & Van Dine, 1997; Harer & Steffensmeier, 1996). Security level was taken directly from SISCOF with the category maximum scoring 3, medium 2, and minimum 1. Mean age was the average age of all inmates in a prison at interview. The proportion of White inmates in a prison provided a measure of a prison's racial composition.

Findings

Comparing Male and Female Inmates: Bivariate Analysis

Table 1 compares mean differences of dependent and independent variables for male and female inmates. The differences in monthly rule violations for the two genders were not significant. Roughly half of both genders (51%) committed rule violations, a finding that differs from that reported by Goetting and Howsen (1983; about 40% for females vs. about 50% for males) and Craddock (1996b; about 33% for females vs. about 50% for males).

Table 1 also contains comparisons by gender of the individual-level and prison-level variables. In terms of the external informal social support mechanisms at the individual level, only the differences for marital status were not significant. That is, only about 17% of both male and female inmates reported being married at the time of the interview. These figures are lower for both genders than those that were reported in 1979 (Goetting & Howsen, 1983) and lower for females than those that were reported in 1991 (Owen & Bloom, 1995). In terms of the other external informal social support mechanisms, significantly more female inmates (80%) had either an adult or minor child (or children) than did male inmates (65%). Female inmates also had more calls to or received from children (52%), mail sent to or received from children (62%), and visits by children (33%) than were reported for male inmates (36%, 43%, and 25%, respectively). Thus, the findings on four of the five individual-level informal social support variables confirm our expectations.

At the prison level, only one of the two internal social support mechanisms was significantly different for institutions housing males compared to those housing females. That is, prisons housing females had significantly higher levels of participation in inmate-organized groups or clubs. The inmate participation levels in formal programs found in either type of facility were not significantly different when examined by gender. Thus, at the prison level, only one of two hypotheses was confirmed.

We also found significant differences for many of the individual-level and prison-level control variables. For example, consistent with Goetting and Howsen's (1983) findings, female inmates were older and more likely to be poly drug users but had fewer prior sentences and shorter sentences than did their male counterparts. Compared to findings reported by Goetting and Howsen (1983) and Owen and Bloom (1995), our findings revealed that inmates' average age appears to have been in an upward spiral since 1979. At the prison level, there were no differences between prisons holding male

Table 1
Mean Comparisons of Key Variables Between Males and Females

Variable	<i>M</i>		Significance (two-tailed <i>t</i> test)
	Male	Female	
Dependent variable			
Rule violations per month	6.88E-02	7.59E-02	.632
Independent variables			
Individual level (level 1) ^a			
Marital status at interview (yes = 1, no = 0)	0.17	0.17	.282
Have children (yes = 1, no = 0)	0.65	0.80	.000
Calls to or received from children (yes = 1, no = 0)	0.36	0.52	.000
Mail sent to or received from children (yes = 1, no = 0)	0.43	0.62	.000
Visited by children (yes = 1, no = 0)	0.25	0.33	.000
Age at interview	33.37	34.21	.000
Race of respondent (White = 1, Black = 0)	0.49	0.48	.637
Number of prior sentences	2.03	1.68	.000
Sentence (months) ^b	351.14	202.61	.000
Regular poly drug use	1.80	2.21	.000
Independent variables			
Prison level (level 2) ^c			
Prison programs participated	1.04	1.14	.136
Inmate-organized groups or clubs participated	1.25	1.67	.000
Security level	2.27	2.09	.101
Population count on sampling day	1,802	851	.000
Inmate average age	33.39	34.20	.022
% White inmates	.49	.49	.965

a. $n = 13,255$.

b. Life or death sentence was excluded in the computation of the mean.

c. $n = 262$.

inmates and prisons holding female inmates in terms of racial composition or assigned security level.

Understanding Monthly Rule Violations: Gender-Specific, Multilevel Analysis

Table 2 shows the estimates of two-level coefficients based on the population average models with the log link for rule violation rate for male and female inmates, respectively.⁵ In the population average models, all the inde-

Table 2
The Effects of Two-Level Variables on Rule Violations per Month

Independent Variables	Males ^a		Females ^b	
	Slope	SE	Slope	SE
Intercept	-1.3101**	0.4345	4.0184	2.0300
Individual level (level 1)				
Marital status at interview	-.2572**	.0721	-.0180	.1470
Have children	-.0009	.0606	-.1143	.1663
Calls to or received from children	-.2006**	.0658	-.3173*	.1467
Mail sent to or received from children	.1284	.0670	-.0940	.1640
Visited by children	.0625	.0624	.1286	.1382
Age at interview	-.0746***	.0032	-.0850***	.0079
Race of respondent	-.1549**	.0467	-.0926	.1119
Number of prior sentences	.1339***	.0146	.1892***	.0349
Sentence (months)	-.0009	.0606	.0002*	.0001
Regular poly drug use	.0779***	.0097	.0427	.0220
Prison level (level 2)				
Prison programs participated	.2274	.1251	.6343	.3346
Inmate-organized groups or clubs participated	.0781	.1408	.0084	.2666
Security level	.1991*	.0856	.0365	.1399
Population count on sampling day	-.0001***	.0000	-.0001	.0002
Inmate average age	-.0082	.0148	-.1335*	.0589
% White inmates	.4351	.3689	-.7325	.6457
Variance explained at the prison level	23%		31%	

a. $n = 8,934$ for level 1. $n = 207$ for level 2.

b. $n = 2,027$ for level 1. $n = 45$ for level 2.

* $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$. *** $p < .001$.

pendent variables, except for the intercept, were constrained to be the same across prisons in the sample.

The model for male inmates in Table 2 reveals that at the inmate level, six variables were statistically significant: two social support variables and four control variables. The two social support variables included a support resources variable and a support process variable. That is, married male inmates were less likely to commit rule violations than were unmarried ones. Furthermore, being a married male inmate decreased the expected rule violation rate by 23% ($= 100 [\exp(-.2572) - 1]$), holding all other variables constant. For the variable calls, moving from the *yes* category to the *no* category decreased the mean rule violation rate by 18% ($= 100 [\exp(-.2006) - 1]$), holding all other variables constant.

Among the four significant control variables, age was negatively related to the log rule violation rate, as older inmates had fewer monthly rule violations. White inmates were less likely to have write-ups than were Black

inmates. Higher numbers of prior sentences were also associated with higher rule violation rates. Finally, those inmates with a drug-use history also had higher monthly rule violations.

At the prison level, the contributions of the two social support variables—formal support and informal support within prison—were not statistically significant.⁶ The contributions of the two remaining control variables, however, were statistically significant. That is, inmates incarcerated in higher security levels had higher rule violations per month, a finding that is consistent with other research on the topic (Stephan, 1997; Stephan & Karberg, 2003). In addition, prison size negatively affected the log rule violation rate, as inmates in larger facilities reported fewer monthly rule violations. Finally, the full model for male inmates explained 23% of the variance at the prison level.

Four variables were statistically significant for females at the individual level (see Table 2), including one social support variable and three control variables. The social support variable—calls to or received from children—reduced rule violations per month. That is, female inmates who called to or received calls from children decreased the expected rule violations rate by 27% ($= 100 [\exp(-.3173) - 1]$), holding all other variables constant. For the three significant control variables, age was negatively related to the log rule violation rate, whereas crime history and sentence length were positively related to it: Older female inmates reported fewer monthly rule violations, whereas those with longer criminal histories and longer sentences had more.

At the prison level, only one control variable was statistically significant: The average age of female inmates in a given prison was negatively related to the log rule violation rate. The full model for female inmates explained 31% of the variance in monthly rule violation rates at the prison level.

In comparison, at the inmate level, the number of children, mail sent to or received from children, and visits by children failed to make a statistically significant contribution to model for either gender; at the prison level, formal support from prison and informal support within prison were similarly unproductive. These findings do not support our expectations. The remaining variables in the models were statistically significant for either both genders or for one of them. For example, in the case of the social support variable at the inmate level, the effect of marital status on rule violations per month was significant for male inmates but insignificant for female inmates. This finding is consistent with our research expectation that the effect of social support on inmate misconduct is gender specific. The effect of calls on rule violations per month was significant for both genders, a finding that also supports the expectation that social support affects inmate misconduct. However, a *t* test for the difference in the effects for male and female inmates was

not statistically significant. In short, calls are equally important for male and female inmates.

Although we made no specific predictions about the effect of the control variables, the findings relative to them are instructive. For example, the effects of age and crime history on the dependent variable were significant for both genders, but the former effect is negative, whereas the latter is positive. In addition, *t* tests for the difference in the effects for male and female inmates were not statistically significant. Furthermore, the effects of race and drug-use history on the dependent variable were statistically significant for male inmates but not for female inmates, whereas the effect of sentence length on the dependent variable was significant for female inmates but not for male inmates. Apparently these effects also varied by gender.

At the prison level, the coefficients for formal and informal support were not significant for both genders. These findings are inconsistent with our expectations about a gendered effect on inmate misconduct for institutional-level social support. Also, the effect of racial composition on rule violations per month was not significant for either gender. The effect of security level on rule violations per month was insignificant for female inmates but was significant for male inmates. The results for males are consistent with Huebner's (2003) findings but are inconsistent with findings reported by Camp and associates (2003). Like security level, the effect of population size on rule violations per month was insignificant for females but was significant for male inmates. The result for males is consistent with findings for the inmate-on-inmate assault model reported by Huebner (2003). Finally, the effect of the average age of inmates in a prison on the dependent variable was significant for female inmates but not for male inmates. Again, although institutional-level support mechanisms failed to yield significant insights into the monthly rule violation rates for either gender, there were gender-based differences in each model.

Discussion

In this study, we employed several different methods to examine the effect of social support on inmate adjustment to prison. Comparisons in social support levels for male and female inmates were generally consistent with what we expected: Female inmates have significantly higher levels of social support. There are several possible explanations for these differences. The first derives from inmates themselves. That is, female inmates are more relationship oriented and, as a consequence, more likely to participate in inmate-organized social groups or clubs, a finding supportive of the importation perspective. The second possible reason derives from the prison environment.

That is, the social world found in prisons for women, in contrast to that found in prisons for males, tends to be less based on coercive power structures, a finding more reflective of the deprivation perspective. Given these facility-based differences, combined with female prisoners' propensities for relationship building, they may be more willing and able to create and maintain interpersonal ties within prison than are males (Zingraff, 1980).

With regard to the relationships between seven measures of social support and rule violations per month, we found that for males two variables were statistically significant, and five variables were not; for females, we found that one variable was significant, and six variables were not. To explore those variables that failed to exhibit significant ties to the degree of a social support matter, we used the variables of the number of children, calls, mail, and visitations as count- or ordinal-level variables in the HGLM analysis; the results are the same in significance and relationship directions as shown in Table 2, where they were used as dichotomous variables.

We also examined whether the effect of social support mechanisms on inmate misconduct was gender specific. Of five social support variables at the inmate level and two at the prison level, only marital status affected monthly rule violations differently for males and for females. That is, married male inmates were less likely to have write-ups than were unmarried male inmates. There were no differences between married and unmarried female inmates. Perhaps wives provide more social support for their incarcerated spouses than do husbands for their incarcerated spouses. Indeed, wives are more likely to visit their incarcerated husbands and take care of children than are husbands to visit their incarcerated wives and take care of children (Pollock, 2002).

The overall gender comparisons for general social support level are largely consistent with our expectations; however, gender comparisons for the social support–misconduct relationship failed to conform to some of our hypotheses. These latter inconsistencies may be because of weak measures of social support or to the lack of specification in the hypotheses. This topic needs to be examined further. Moreover, why do some variables help to reduce monthly rule violations and others do not? Again, we cannot answer this question with the present data. Wethington and Kessler (1986) found that perceived support is more important than received support in predicting adjustment of stressful life events. Is perceived support more important than received support in predicting the rule violation rate in prison? This question too must be left to others as it is beyond the reach of our data.

This study contains several policy suggestions for prison administrators. Both the extant literature and the findings revealed in this study have indicated that inmate mothers have a strong desire to communicate with their

children and that inmates who have children have active contacts with their children. Contacts with family members, especially children, help inmates to keep the family ties and hopes alive (Howser & MacDonald, 1982), reduce the pains of imprisonment (Gordon, 1999), decrease the pressures to turn to the inmate subculture (Zingraff, 1980), and increase the chances for the postrelease success (Gordon, 1999). Therefore, the connections with outside world programs generally should be continued or expanded.

We found that married male inmates make better adjustments to prison. Hence whatever actions prison administrators and others can reasonably take to help maintain the marriages of incarcerated male inmates will benefit both the prisoners and the prison community. Although we did not find a significant relationship between marriage and inmate adjustment to prison for female inmates, this finding suggests that their husbands have not provided sufficient support. In other words, although marriage is a social support resource for married male inmates, it may be not used or transformed into social capital—that is, mobilized into a social resource—for females (Wright et al., 2001). This latter topic merits further attention by researchers and policy analysts.

As prison superintendent Elaine Lord (1995) observed

In America, we have gotten caught up in arguments of equality but seldom can define equality or even identify *equal to what* [italics added]. In the case of prisoners, equal generally means equal to men prisoners. . . . Why don't we make it a policy to do programs for mothers and then add programs for fathers? (p. 266)

We lean toward Lord's argument. As noted previously, the literature indicates that female and male inmates are different in preprison socialization and life experiences and in-prison values and behavior. Our study also has revealed that female inmates have higher contacts with their children. Women inmates are also different from their male counterparts in other aspects. For example, the classification systems used within prisons for women are different, as they consider different risk factors and needs assessments (Mays & Winfree, 2002; see also Bill, 1998; Burke & Adams, 1991). Women's health care and related medical needs are different from those faced by men, in or out of prison (Heney & Kristiansen, 1998; Ross & Lawrence, 1998). Therefore, prison programs may wish to consider the differences between male and female inmates to be more effective. As an example, parenting programs should teach inmates with the recognition of different gender roles in our society. Notice that when we say prison programs should consider the gender difference, we are not suggesting that prison administrators and staff members treat male and female inmates differently in all aspects of confinement.

Conclusions

In the current study we have addressed the social support level and the effects of social support and commonly used non-social support variables on inmate adjustment to prison, controlling for gender. We comprehensively reviewed the gender-social support relationships and the reasons for the gendered social support effect on inmate adjustment. Using HGLM to analyze nationally representative data, we found that female inmates have higher social support based on the number of children (support resource), calls made or received from children (support process), mail sent or received from children (support process), and visitations by children (support process) in comparison with their male counterparts. Both our findings and the extant literature indicate that female inmates have higher social support from their children, whereas male inmates receive higher support from their married spouses.

Apparently inmates who have social support may or may not have lower rule violation rates compared to inmates who lack these support mechanisms. We found that although the variable calls leads to lower rule violation per month for male and female inmates, the variables mail, visitation, and formal and informal support from prison do not affect inmates' misconduct. We also learned that differences in social support for male and female inmates are not necessarily associated with the differences in the effect of social support on the rule violation rate. Male and female inmates in the 1997 SISCF survey differ in the number of children, calls, mail, visitations, and formal and informal support from prison; they do not differ in terms of their impact on rule violations per month. In addition, our comparisons involving marital status revealed that the absence of gender-based differences in social support does not mean that there are no differences in the effect of social support on inmate misconduct.

Our research has also found that for male inmates, age, race, crime history, and drug use at the inmate level and security level and prison size at the prison level have an effect on their rule violation rate. For female inmates, age, crime history, and sentence length at the inmate level and the average age of inmate at the prison level affect their misconduct. These findings support our basic position that the forces behind rule violations are different for male and female inmates. They also suggest that state of knowledge about gender-based variations in prison violence, including rule violations, is quite rudimentary.

These findings should be read with some caution. The 1997 SISCF survey collected self-report data. Therefore, the commonly recognized problems for self-report data may exist. In addition, the rule violation recording policies

and practices of a given prison or correctional staff could influence the record of rule violations (Harer & Steffensmeier, 1996; Pollock, 2002; Poole & Regoli, 1980). Moreover, even though we employed several social support variables, we cannot distinguish between perceived and actual support or between instrumental and expressive support because of the nature of the data. Thus, a more comprehensive measure of social support is needed to better test the effect of social support on inmate behavior in prison. Finally, prison crowding—a commonly used institutional predictor—was not available in the 1997 SISCF survey.

Nonetheless, we are confident in our estimates for several reasons. First, data on inmate misconduct were found to not be racially biased (Hewitt, Poole, & Regoli, 1984) and may reflect more accurately the universe of prison behavior than arrest or conviction data do for street crimes (Camp et al., 2003). Next, this study has analyzed the effect of inmate- and prison-level predictors simultaneously, which may provide more reliable estimates of the relative effects of predictors from each level of analysis (Raudenbush & Bryk, 2002; Wooldredge et al., 2001). This study has used HGLM as the primary analysis technique, a procedure that produces better estimates than does a pooled regression (Wooldredge et al., 2001).

In summary, the present study contributes to the literature in several ways. First, our study explicitly provides a systematic examination of the gendered effect of social support on inmate adjustment to prison, to our knowledge something no one else has done before. Next, we use a national sample, and this adds to the generalizability of the findings. Third, our quantitative analysis not only compares social support for male and female inmates using significance tests but also examines the effect of social support variables at the inmate and prison levels. Fourth, the study enriches the extant literature on the nonsocial support variables and rule violations by comparing male and female prisoners. Fifth, the gender-based comparisons add to the theoretical discussions of social support theory, particularly in terms of the possible differential effect of such mechanisms on men and women. Finally, the study provides decision makers with empirical evidence for the arguments by Lord (1995) for equality in programmatic treatment for all inmates, irrespective of gender.

Notes

1. In the case of prior research on the subject, inmate adjustment to prison was either measured by assimilation into the inmate subculture (Zingraff, 1980) or psychological well-being (Hart, 1995) rather than by misconduct.

2. The following summary was adapted from the Bureau of Justice Statistics and Federal Bureau of Prisons (2000) for the Interuniversity Consortium for Political and Social Research data set 2598.

3. The survey consists of two distinct surveys—the 1997 survey of inmates in state correctional facilities and the 1997 survey of inmates in federal correctional facilities. However, the present analysis focuses solely on the state survey, providing nationally representative data on all state prison inmates in the United States.

4. Coefficient alpha is the most commonly used reliability coefficient in social science research. It measures the reliability or consistency of a simple sum of parallel measures (Bollen, 1989).

5. This study also estimated the two-level coefficients based on one-way ANOVA. The variances at the prison level were 0.30644 for male model and 0.58732 for female model.

6. This study also tested the effect of participation in prison-organized education and other programs (using the same items as formal support within prison) at the inmate level. The relationship is not statistically significant. This finding is not consistent with what idealism believed (Ubah & Robinson, 2003) and is also different from the findings reported by Adams et al. (1994).

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