

Female Offenders' Egocentric Social Networks and Access to Needed Resources

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Reasons for Studying Women 's Egocentric Social Networks and Access to Needed Resources

Rich qualitative research has long informed who women in the criminal legal system activated for emotional and tangible support. Much less is known about their broader social networks. The present study utilizes innovative social network software and egocentric social network methods and techniques to collect data on women offenders' semiregular interaction partners. Two key research objectives are to 1) present a descriptive assessment of women's social support networks and access to social capital through these networks and 2) identify participant (e.g., financial hardship, limited education), network member (e.g., age, gender, criminal history), tie (e.g., closeness, frequency of contact), and network characteristics (e.g., density, proportion kin) that are associated with access to resources commonly needed by women.

The Research

To collect the data, face-to-face interviews were completed with a sample of 160 justice-involved women (50 who were on parole and 110 who were on probation) about their 1313 network members. The research involves a two-study design. The first study examines women's access to resources from individuals who they "know" based on a 26-item resource generator. Single-level analyses are used to examine the prediction of access to political social capital and personal and problem-solving social capital, two dimensions of the resource generator.

- *Political social capital* is the access to government institutions and political figures. This can also refer to ties to formal institutions.
- *Personal and problem-solving social capital* is the general access to resources such as education, employment, and other financial resources.

The second study focuses on dyadic social capital and the structure and composition of women's networks. Multilevel regression models are tested to predict access to resources from specific network members.

Findings from Study 1: Access to Social Capital from People women "Know"

Findings from the first study suggest women had access to nearly three-quarters of the 26 resource generator items but demonstrated resource deficits in relation to political social capital (i.e., elected officials, someone who works at City Hall). Assessment of the connection between participant characteristics and access to personal and problem-solving capital suggests that women who attained higher levels of education were more likely to have access to social capital. Regarding political social capital, women who reported increased employment and financial needs (i.e., unemployed, unable to pay bills without help from family or friends) and women who had recently been arrested were less likely to have access to social capital.

Findings from Study 2: Access to Dyadic Social Capital

Findings from the second study suggest that women possess eight semiregular interaction partners. One-third of network members had previously been involved with the law and many were substance users. Networks were moderately dense and comprised of mostly women. When assessing network members' access to specific resources, as show in the table below, most could serve as good job reference or provide emergency housing, but few could sometimes employ people or lend a large sum of money. Notably, crime-involved and/or substance abusing ties accounted for approximately half of women's access to social capital. (Table 6 is from Goodson, 2019.)

Table 6. Dyadic Social Capital from Nominated Ties (*N* = 1313)

Variable Description	<i>n</i>	%
Can sometimes employ people	335	25.5
Give advice about money problems	628	47.8
Lend a large sum of money	333	25.4
Lend a small sum of money	716	54.5
Provide a place to stay for a week	749	57.0
Give sound legal advice	503	38.3
Give a good job reference	769	58.6
None of the above	243	18.5

Older participants and those with higher employment and financial needs were less likely to be tied to individuals who provided access to social capital. Network members who were older in age, employed, and emotionally close to the participant were particularly helpful in providing women access to resources. A test of an interaction effect between network characteristics revealed that for women with loosely knit networks (i.e., low density), increases in the proportion of kinship ties within the network was associated with reduced access to social capital.

Implications for Practice

Despite the stigmatizing effects of a felony conviction and/or imprisonment, women are able to build new and preserve old relationships in their communities. However, the connections are limited in their access to capital through people in formal institutions. Supervising agents can facilitate these types of connections. Women with more employmt/financial needs and lower educational achievement are least likely to have access to social capital. Thus, there is reason for correctional institutions to continue to encourage women to pursue academic and vocational training.

Source: Marva V. Goodson, *Female Offenders' Egocentric Social Networks an Access to Needed Resources*. A Disertation Completed at Michigan State University, 2019.