

RECIDIVISM PREVENTION THROUGH PROSOCIAL SUPPORT:  
A SYSTEMATIC REVIEW OF EMPIRICAL RESEARCH

by

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A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements  
for the Honors in the Major Program in Social Work  
in the College of Health and Public Affairs  
and in The Burnett Honors College  
at the University of Central Florida  
Orlando, Florida

Spring Term 2014

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## **Abstract**

Of the 700 offenders that are released from prison each year, seven in ten will be rearrested.

There are a number of barriers face by released offenders that inhibit their successful reentry.

These barriers include: mental health illness, limited work experience, lower education, substance abuse, lack of transportation, homelessness and poverty strain of family ties and/or close relationships. This paper explores the impact of social support on recidivism rates through a systematic review of the literature surrounding prosocial support. The implications for social work practice and research are also discussed.

## **DEDICATION**

For my loving parents, who have always encouraged me to work smart and hard to  
achieve my goals

For every teacher who believed in me, pushed me, and help me realize a potential I would  
not have otherwise found.

For my friends who have become family and inspire me every day to do and be better.

## **ACKNOWLEDGMENTS**

Without the expertise and support from my committee members I would not have been able to accomplish this project. Each of them took time, effort, and energy out of their days over a three semester period to help guide me. For that they will always have my gratitude.

Special acknowledgements are owed to my thesis chair, Dr. Shawn Lawrence. Dr. Lawrence was a constant source of knowledge and support throughout this project.

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## **INTRODUCTION**

Over 700,000 individuals are released from prisons each year (Mears & Cochran, 2012). Seven in ten offenders will be rearrested and half of that population will be back in prison within three years of release (Langan & Levin, 2002; Visher & Travis, 2003). In addition to the large number of individuals reentering the community, there is a lack of community-based care available to released offenders (Wheeler & Patterson, 2008) and many released offenders do not receive supervision or support (Orrick et al., 2011). Released offenders face several barriers to successful reentry such as mental health illness, limited work experience, strain of family ties and/or close relationships, lower education, substance abuse, lack of transportation, homelessness and poverty (Petersilia, 2005; Uggen, Wakefield, & Western, 2005; Weiman, 2007; Phillips & Lindsay, 2009; Koschmann & Peterson, 2013).

The Second Chance Act is a bill designed to help overcome the barriers released offenders experience and improve reentry efforts (O'Hear, 2007). Grants are provided to local, state and tribal authorities to fund reentry programs such as transitional homes and substance abuse clinics (O'Hear, 2007) and funding is considered through seven areas: Demonstration Grants, Mentoring Grants, Offender Reentry Substance Abuse Programming, Family Treatment Planning, Federal Reentry Initiatives, Reentry Research, and the National Adult and Juvenile Offender Resources Center ("SCA," 2013). In 2013 the Second Chance Act was reauthorized in 2013 to be funded up to the 2018 fiscal year ("SCA," 2013). While there has been an increased research and policy focus on recidivism prevention and successful societal reentry, there are limited data on the role of prosocial support in facilitating offenders successful reentering the community (Uggen et al., 2005; Berg & Huedner, 2011).



## **Overview of Reentry**

Reentry is the process of transitioning from incarceration to the community (Clear, Waring, & Scully, 2005). Visher & Travis (2003) describes reentry as a process that every individual who has been charged with a crime will experience, regardless of how long an individual spends incarcerated or if an individual spends no time incarcerated. A charge with a crime creates a stigma and an individual must reenter the community after any criminal offense (Visher & Travis, 2003). Researchers must consider that released prisoners, parolees, probationers and offenders who have completed all of the parameters of their sentence are all part of the reentry process (Gunnison & Helfgott, 2013). The reentry process is broken down into a three stage model: institutional, structured reentry, and community reintegration (Taxman, Young, Byrne, Holsinger, & Anspach, 2002). The model identified by Taxman and colleagues (2002), though an ideal model for reentry, is one of many conceptualizations of the reentry process. The first stage, the institutional stage, includes the admission process of incarceration such as the assessments of needs and preliminary planning for post-release success. The second stage, structured reentry, consists of coordinating with community resources and the development of a solidified reentry plan. Structured reentry generally occurs during the last six months of incarceration. The final stage, community reintegration, implements the reentry plan and continues until community-based supervision is successfully completed. In the final stage, formal controls such as police and prison staff are removed, and informal social controls such as family, friends, peers, coworkers and social service providers take an active role in the reentry process (Grommon, 2013). The large number of individuals involved in the reentry process combined with the length of the reentry process is one reason for the lack of research on the

success of reentry-based programs (Grommon, 2013). Because social connections are vital to the final stage of the reentry process and to the successful completion of reentry, a holistic continuum of care cannot be complete without incorporating social support in the reentry process (Shapiro & Schwartz, 2001; Visher & Travis, 2003; Berg & Huedner, 2011).

### **Meaning and Utility of Prosocial Support**

According to social support theory, organized networks of human relationships that offer more support will have lower rates of crime (Duwe & King, 2012). Prosocial support refers to any social connection that is non- criminogenic. Criminogenic factors are conditions that are associated with an increased risk of criminal behavior such as criminal associations, substance use, antisocial values, and unemployment (Andrews & Bonta, 1998).

For the purpose of this paper, prosocial support is defined within the following parameters: support from friends, support from family and support from surrogate strangers. Noncriminal family and friends are important community ties that will help determine the success of offenders once released from incarceration (Shapiro & Schwartz, 2001).

Prosocial support is particularly necessary for those individuals who have been incarcerated as they attempt to reenter society without personal resources such as job skills, education, consistent employment records and prosocial community connections. These individuals must depend on the personal resources of their friends and family (Berg & Huebner, 2011). These personal resources to which an individual has access to human capital (Clear, Waring, & Scully, 2005). Former prisoners experience a lack in human capital (Clear et al., 2005) and often rely upon friends and family for access to resources after release (Uggen et al., 2005; Berg & Huedner, 2011; Grommon, 2013). Though former prisoners face difficulties in

establishing stable family lives, those who develop strong familial ties are more likely to broaden their social networks, create prosocial identities and desist from crime (Uggen et al., 2005).

Berg and Huedner (2011) state that there is an employment and desistance benefit to having quality prosocial ties. While most reentry plans incorporates some level of social support such as case management or interpersonal skill improvement (Grommon, 2013), there is a need for further implementation of prosocial support in reentry programs. There is a need for reentry programs with a focus on prosocial support that can be used in various states, counties, jail and prisons across the United States.

## METHODS

An initial search was conducted on social support focused reentry programs and policy. Criminal Justice Periodical Index, Social Sciences, National Justice Reference Service (NCJRS), PsychINFo, and Academic Search Premier databases were utilized to search for the following keywords: *reentry, recidivism prevention, prosocial, social bonds, intervention, education, family strengthening, social ties, social network, social support, visitation and prison*. The bulk of recidivism prevention is not centered on a strengths based approach for social support rather focusing on vocational or educational training. Few empirical studies evaluate social ties in the forefront of the reentry process.

Eight empirical studies with a focus on prosocial support were identified. All articles selected for review were published between 2008 and 2012 with the exception of LeClair's 1978 Home Furlough Program Effects on Rates of Recidivism. This article was included because home furloughs are no longer practiced in the United States despite their success in United States corrections in the past and continued success abroad. The discontinuation can be, in part, contributed to an incident that occurred in Massachusetts in 1986. Willie Horton, a prisoner in Lawrence Massachusetts was furloughed and did not return to custody. He fled to Maryland and committed assault, rape, and robbery. The incident was further sensationalized because the current Massachusetts governor, Michael Dukakis, was the Democratic presidential candidate that year. The home furlough programs granted in Massachusetts were used to damage Dukakis' campaign and the furlough program quickly lost favor in public opinion.

Articles used for this project were published in *Psychology, Crime & Law* (n=1), *Justice Quarterly* (n=1), *The Journal of Scandinavian Studies in Criminology and Crime Prevention* (n=1), *Criminal Justice and Behavior* (n=1), *International Journal of Offender Therapy and Comparative Criminology* (n=1), *The Prison Journal* (n=1), and *Criminal Justice Policy Review* (n=2). *Psychology, Crime & Law* is an international journal that promotes the study and application of psychological approaches to crime, criminal and civil law, and the influence of law on behavior. *Justice Quarterly* is a multidisciplinary journal that primarily focuses on criminal justice issues and research. *The Journal of Scandinavian Studies in Criminology and Crime Prevention* includes Danish, Finnish, Norwegian and Swedish crime prevention research all published in English in order to make the research available to a broader research community. *Criminal Justice and Behavior* publishes research on assessment, classification, prevention, intervention, and treatment programs within the correctional professional in order to develop successful programs based on evidenced based practices. *International Journal of Offender Therapy and Comparative Criminology* is a multidisciplinary journal that focuses research on violent crime, sexual offending, domestic violence, juvenile delinquency, criminal profiling, and risk assessment for clinical practice and theory. *The Prison Journal* focuses on research on adult and juvenile confinement, treatment interventions, and alternative sanctions in theory, practice, and policy. *Criminal Justice Policy Review* is a multidiscipline journal that researches the policy that impacts practice in criminal justice. The journals used in this study are varied and come from multidisciplinary research in order to include the most comprehensive review of literature.

The following elements were used in describing the eight reentry programs evaluated in each study (a) program location, (b) program duration, (c) prosocial tie (family, friend and/or

surrogate), and (d) program limitations. Additionally, the following criteria were used in evaluating the nine studies that examined the aforementioned programs: (a) study design, (b) measurement, (c) sample sizes, (d) findings and (f) limitations. The criteria used in the delineation of the eight programs used in this study were adopted from an empirical research study (Abel, 2000) and adapted to fit the needs of this project. The Maryland Scale of Scientific Methods (MSSM) developed by Sherman et al., (1998) is employed to rate the quality of the study. The MSSM can be applied across all settings in order to offer a universal evaluation of studies based on an overall rating of the following factors: Control of other variables in the analysis that might have been the true causes of any observed connection between a program and crime, measurement error from such things as subjects lost over time or low interview response rates, statistical power to detect program effects including sample size, base rate of crime, and other factors affecting the likelihood of the study detecting a true difference not due to chance (Sherman et al. 1998).

Finally, the MSSM rates the study from 1 (weakest) to 5 (strongest).

- Level 1: Correlation between a crime prevention program and a measure of crime or crime risk factors at a single point in time.
- Level 2: Temporal sequence between the program and the crime or risk outcome clearly observed, or the presence of a comparison group without demonstrated comparability to the treatment group.
- Level 3: A comparison between two or more comparable units of analysis, one with and one without the program.
- Level 4: Comparison between multiple units with and without the program, controlling for other factors, or using comparison units that evidence only minor differences.
- Level 5: Random assignment and analysis of comparable units to program and comparison groups (Sherman et al., 1998).

Table 1 in the Appendix provide the summary of the framework of the studies to be reviewed using the above mentioned criteria.

## **ANALYSIS OF EMPIRICAL LITERATURE**

The following section provides a description of the studies of reentry programs and interventions that focus on prosocial support. Articles in this review focus on prison visitation (two studies), home furloughs (two studies), the InnerChange Program, Reasoning and Rehabilitation (R&R) programme, the Skejby Halfway House Reintegration Program, and Creating Lasting Family Connections (CLFC).

### **Prison Visitation**

Incarceration removes inmates from more intimate relationships such as family and friends (Cochran & Mears, 2013). Upon release offenders commonly depend on family members for emotional support, financial support, and identity transformation (Berg & Huedner, 2011). Prison visitation offers inmates access to those close family relationships during incarceration and strengthen prosocial connections that will benefit them after their release (Cochran, 2013). In this review two recent studies on prison visitation are reviewed: The Minnesota Department of Corrections (2011) and Mears, Cochran, Siennick, & Bales, (2012).

The Minnesota Department of Corrections (2011) evaluates the effects of prison visitation on recidivism by performing a five year follow up on 15,645 offenders who were released from Minnesota prisons between 2003 and 2007. In an effort to reduce selection bias in the results the Minnesota Department of Corrections (2011) researchers employ a Cox regression model using the following risk factors: minority, age, prior supervision failures, prior felony convictions, admission type, sentence length, offense time, institutional discipline, drug treatment, sex offender treatment, supervision type, release year, and supervised release revocations.



Building from Derkzen et al. (2009) and Bales and Mears (2008), the Minnesota Department of Corrections expands prison-visitation research by 1) including all offenders released from Minnesota prisons during 2003-2007, rather than only including offenders with a minimum of 12 month sentence's, thus allowing for greater generalization of the findings, 2) determining if the timing of the visits by family or friends impacts recidivism, 3) by expanding the number of inmate-visitor relationships to 16 categories, 4) by engaging in a lengthy five-year follow-up and 5) including recidivism due to technical violations such as use of alcohol, failing to maintain agent contact or failure to follow curfew (Minnesota Department of Corrections [DOC], 2011).

Recidivism, the outcome variable, is measured as 1) a reconviction for a new felony-level offense and 2) a revocation for a technical violation (Minnesota Department of Corrections [DOC], 2011). The inmates' social support network size is measured in five ways: 1) any visit, 2) number of individual visitors, 3) total number of visits, 4) monthly number of visits, and 5) recent number of visits (Minnesota Department of Corrections [DOC], 2011). Social support was identified as 16 different relationships: 1) spouse, 2) ex-spouse, 3) son or daughter, 4) mother, 5) father, 6) other parent/guardian, 7) sibling, 8) in-law, 9) other relative, 10) grandparent, 11) grandchildren, 12) friend, 13) clergy, 14) mentor, 15) other professional, and 16) other (Minnesota Department of Corrections [DOC], 2011).

The researchers hypothesized that (a) visitation would decrease recidivism by strengthening social bonds to potential support networks, (b) that the relationship of the visitor to the inmate would be significant in reducing recidivism, (c) that the number of visits over the entire length of stay in prison would be significant in reducing recidivism (d) and the timing of

visits during the length of stay in prison would impact recidivism outcomes (Minnesota Department of Corrections [DOC], 2011).

Results indicate that of the 15,645 inmates, 61 percent were visited at least once during their incarceration and the average number of visits per inmate was 36, or the equivalent of two visits per month. On average, each inmate was visited by three individuals; the three relationship types that visited most often were friend (47 percent), mother (approximately 33 percent), and sibling (approximately 25 percent).

The hypothesis that visitation reduces recidivism was supported. Overall, inmates who were visited were 13 percent less likely to recidivate than inmates who were not visited. The hypothesis that relationship of the visitor to the inmates had a significant effect on recidivism was supported. Visitations from mentors reduced recidivism by 29 percent, and visits by clergy reduced recidivism by 24 percent. In-law visits reduced recidivism by 21 percent, siblings reduced recidivism by 10 percent, and other family reduced recidivism by nine percent. Finally, visits by friends, who visited most often, reduced recidivism by seven percent. The analysis also revealed that visits from ex-spouses increased the risk of recidivism. The hypothesis that the number of visits would significantly affect recidivism was also supported. One visit resulted in a .01 reduction of recidivism whereas regular monthly visits resulted in .9 percent reduction in recidivism. The hypothesis that the time of visitation had a significant effect on recidivism was also supported. Visits closer to an inmate's release were 3.6 percent more influential in preventing recidivism than visits at the beginning of an inmate's sentence.

The major limitation of the Minnesota Department of Corrections (2011) study was the dichotomization of race as either minority or white. This dichotomization places all minorities,

despite their cultural differences, in the same category, and limits researches understanding of how social support impacts individual minority groups which are over represented in our prison systems (Jung, Spieldnes, & Yamatani, 2010; Conyers, 2013). Researchers in the Minnesota Department of Corrections (2011) study do not address why they chose to dichotomize race. Despite this limitation the Minnesota Department of Corrections (2011) expanded the understanding of social relationships impacting recidivism and how visitation can be used to make the most significant impact on recidivism.

Mears, Cochran, Siennick, & Bales, (2012) evaluated the effects of prison visitation from families, friends and spouses on recidivism up to three years after release. Mears et al., (2012) examined the effect of visitation on inmates in Florida who served twelve months or less between November 1<sup>st</sup> 2000 and April 30<sup>th</sup> 2001 (n=3,903). The possibility of selection bias was addressed by employing a propensity score matching to predict the probability of receiving a visit for each inmate and then balancing the matching variable so that average probability scores were not statistically significant (Mears et al., 2012). A three year follow up assessed the impact of any visitation, the number of visits, and type of visits on recidivism (Mears et al., 2012).

Recidivism, as the dependent variable, was defined as whether an inmate was reconvicted of a felony resulting in new sanctions within three years of being released (Mears et al., 2012). Visitation, the independent variable, was identified in three distinct relationship types: spouse or significant other, other family members, and friends.

The researchers hypothesized that visitation would be associated with lower rates of recidivism and that the number and type of visitation would be significant in impacting timing and type of recidivism (Mears et al., 2012). Results from the propensity score matching reveal

that overall visitation reduces all types of recidivism by 10 percent with the exception of property offenses which is only reduced by three percent. The researchers hypothesis that visitation reduces recidivism was supported. Additionally, visitation had an effect on the type of recidivism: 10 percent of inmates who were not visited were reconvicted of violent offenses while only seven percent of visited inmates were reconvicted of violent crimes. Type of visit dependent on relationship also affected recidivism: being visited by a spouse or significant other resulted in a 9.6 percent reduction, visitation from a friend reduced recidivism by 8.3 percent, and family, non-spousal/significant other, resulted in a 3.9 percent reduction. Compared to the prison visitation study completed by the Minnesota Department of Corrections (2011) where 61 percent of inmates were visited, Mears and colleagues (2012) report that only 24% of the sample received a visitation.

The major limitations of Mears and colleagues (2012) study include the 12 month or fewer prison stay for control and intervention group, and the limited scope of social relationship visit types. On average, inmates serving sentences for nonviolent offenses will have a length of stay of 2.26 years and violent offenders will have an average length of stay of 3.83 years (Patterson & Preston, 2008). Limiting visitation data to only 12 months when most inmates serve sentences twice as long on average is a significant limitation. Mears and colleagues (2012) also limit the scope of social relationships to three categories (spouses and/or significant others, other family and friends) and does not review the potential impact of clergy, mentors, or volunteers from the community.

### **Home Furloughs**

Home furlough programs are no longer utilized in the United States but were once commonly used to both reward inmates and prevent recidivism by assisting in the reentry process (Baumer, O'Donnell, & Hughes, 2009). However, home furloughs are still used outside the United States and are recognized as was to strengthen reentry efforts. Markley (1973) identified five major functions of home furloughs related to reentry: (1) reinforcement of family ties, (2) reinforcement of self-esteem of the offender by creating a situation of trust, (3) benefitting the offender's children through contact, (4) contribution to community reintegration, and (5) providing positive aid to crime prevention. LeClair (1978) evaluated the last furlough program in the United States. He studied the impact of home furloughs on recidivism among inmates who were incarcerated between 1973 and 1974. A more recent study conducted by Irish researchers, Baumer, O'Donnell, & Hughes (2009), evaluated the impact of home furloughs on recidivism among inmates who were incarcerated between 2001 and 2004.

LeClair (1978) evaluated the use of home furloughs between 1973 and 1974 in Massachusetts state correctional facilities including two maximum security institutions, one medium security institution, four minimum security institutions, and seven pre-release centers. LeClair's evaluation focused on how allowing offenders to access family connections influenced recidivism by drawing two separate samples from 1973 (n=878) and 1974 (n=841). Of the 878 participants in study one, 610 inmates received at least one furlough and the remaining 268 received no furlough. Of the 841 participants in study two, 621 inmates received at least one furlough and the remaining 220 inmates received no furlough. Chi-square

Recidivism, used as the standard measure, was defined as "any subject who was returned or sentenced to a state or federal correctional institution, a county house of correction, or a jail

for 30 days or more within one full year from the subjects release date from prison” (LeClair, 1978, p. 252).

Because home furloughs are not granted on a random basis, but rather by a furlough committee to assess risk of inmate noncompliance during furlough, selection bias can interfere with the results. LeClair (1978) attempts to eliminate selection bias in the results by determining the recidivism risk of each subsample before the intervention using chi-square to measure statistical differences in recidivism risk. The furlough and control group had predicted recidivism rates of 25 and 27 percent, respectively, in study one. In study two the furlough and control group had predicted recidivism rates of 24 percent and 25.8 percent, respectively. In both studies the predicted difference in recidivism was deemed statistically insignificant.

LeClair (1978) hypothesized that inmates who had experienced at least one home furlough during their incarceration would recidivate less than the control group. Findings from the first study show that the recidivism rate for the intervention group, 16 percent, was lower than the control group at 27 percent. Study two showed similar results as the intervention group against recidivated at a rate of 16 percent and the control group recidivated at 31 percent.

Though this study demonstrates the potential of home furloughs on recidivism prevention, it is not without its limitations. LeClair (1978) does not examine the impact of different aspects home furloughs—when during an inmate sentence did the furlough take place, how many furloughs did each individual receive, are multiple furloughs more effective in reducing recidivism than one, how long were inmates allowed to stay in the community at one time. LeClair (1978) does not include important information about the furloughs which hinders understanding on how furloughs best prevent recidivism.

Though home furloughs are no longer utilized in the United States, other countries still make use of this program. Baumer, O'Donnell, & Hughes (2009) evaluated one such program in Ireland. Between January 1, 2001 and November 30, 2004, 19,955 individuals were granted temporary release from prisons. Again, selection bias is avoided in the results by determining the recidivism risk of each subsample before the intervention using chi-square to measure statistical differences in recidivism risk. Success was evaluated by measuring recidivism in two types of home furloughs: furloughs to spend time with family or furloughs to seek vocational training or job placement (Baumer et al., 2009). For the purpose of this project focus will be given to the individuals furloughed to spend time with family; however the difference in recidivism rates between the two types of furloughs were not statistically significant (Baumer et al., 2009). Members of the intervention group were allowed, on average, between five and 20 days in the community during a 90 day sentence.

The researchers hypothesized that having access to the community through home furloughs during prison sentencing would reduce reoffending. Recidivism was identified as nonspecific imprisonment within four years after the inmates release from prison. Results indicated that individuals in the intervention group who were allowed home furloughs of 10-20 days, recidivated less than the control group, 43 percent vs. 48 percent respectively (Baumer, O'Donnell, & Hughes, 2009).

As with LeClair's (1978) study, Baumer and colleagues (2009) acknowledge the potential of selection bias. Participants in the intervention group were not assessed for eligibility through a risk assessment process, leaving selection bias unanswered. Baumer and colleagues (2009) also do not address when the furloughs took place during an inmate's sentence.

## **InnerChange Program**

Duwe & King (2012) assessed the InnerChange program in a Minnesota male prison. InnerChange is a faith-based program that links offenders with volunteer mentors from local faith organization during the last 18 months of incarceration; InnerChange continues for the following 12 months post release with support from mentors (Duwe & King, 2012). Mentors serve as surrogates and assist in successful reentry by preparing inmates for family and social relationships, religious and community service and employment (Duwe & King, 2012).

The sample was comprised of 13,484 offenders; 366 inmates were in the InnerChange intervention group while the remaining 13,188 offenders were in the control group. Selection bias in the results was addressed by employing Propensity Score Matching (PSM) to match InnerChange participants with control group members based on recidivism risk. Recidivism was defined in the following ways: (a) re-arrest, (b) reconviction, (c) incarceration for a new crime, or (d) revocation for a technical violation (Duwe & King, 2012). The researchers hypothesized that InnerChange would reduce recidivism in the following ways: (1) traditional or mainstream Christian doctrines promote prosocial lifestyles; (2) Focusing on criminogenic needs that can be changed through social support; (3) Not excluding high-risk offenders (4) Participants live in separate housing while in prison, limiting their exposure to anti-social social interactions; (5) Participants receive support from mentors for up to a year after release; (6) Expanding the prosocial support network for offenders both during and after incarceration.

An evaluation of the InnerChange program was carried out by monitoring the recidivism outcomes of participants released between 2003 and 2009 over a one year follow up. Results indicated that recidivism was reduced by 26 percent for rearrests, 35 percent for reconvictions



and 40 percent for new offense incarceration (Duwe & King, 2012). InnerChange did not significantly affect recidivism for technical violations. Further breakdown of the results show that a continuum of care, continued relationships with the volunteered mentors, provided the best deterrent of recidivism. One hundred seventy three of the 366 InnerChange participants continued to meet with a mentor in the community while 193 did not engage in a continuum of care. Participants who continued to meet with mentors in the community saw a 44 percent decrease in recidivism for rearrests, 52 percent for reconviction, 95 percent for new offense reincarceration and 62 percent for technical violations compared to the control group.

The major limitation of this study is the absence of a female sample despite the presence of InnerChange in three women's prisons. Female offenders are frequently left out of research despite an acknowledged lack of information about the reasons behind female offending and recidivism (Mears, Cochran, & Bales, 2012).

### **Reasoning and Rehabilitation Programme**

Martin, Hernandez, Hernandez-Fernaund, Arregui, & Hernandez (2010) assessed usefulness of the Spanish adaption of the Reasoning and Rehabilitation Programme in preventing recidivism through the Prosocial Thinking Program (PTP). The Prosocial Thinking Program is the Spanish adaption of the Reasoning and Rehabilitation Programme. The Reasoning and Rehabilitation Programme has been found to be successful in reducing recidivism risk (Tong & Farrington, 2006; Berman, 2004; Friendship, Blud, Erkison, Travers, & Thorton, 2003). The Prosocial Thinking Program is organized in a series of modules taught over 35 sessions. The model includes interpersonal cognitive problem-solving skills, social skills, negotiation skills, emotional management, creative thinking, values enhancement and critical reasoning. The

program was evaluated by comparing the results to the Social and Employment Integration (SEI) program. The Social and Employment Integration program focuses on the skills needed to obtain and hold employment to promote post-release employment and decrease recidivism and has shown effective in reducing recidivism risk (Martin et al., 2010). Recidivism was defined as returning to prison within six years after release for a nonspecific violation.

Researchers hypothesized that the Spanish Adaption of the Reasoning and Rehabilitation Programme, or PTP program, will be successful in preventing recidivism. To evaluate the impact of the program researchers divide the 117 participants in three groups: PTP, n=55, PTP+SEI, n=12, and control group, n=50 and examines recidivism in a six year follow-up (Martin et al., 2010). Participants in this sample had to meet several requirements such as being of working age, had to have local family bonds, and had to agree to participate. Martin et al., (2010) do not address if any steps were taken to avoid selection bias in the sample.

Results indicated that 67.5 percent of the two intervention groups had not recidivated within six years. The PTP+SEI group had the lowest rate of recidivism 16.7 percent, the PTP group had a recidivism rate of 25.5 percent and the control group had a recidivism rate of 44 percent. The Spanish adaption of the Reasoning and Rehabilitation Programme, or PTP program does appear to be successful in preventing recidivism.

The study's major limitation is sample size. The difference in recidivism between the PTP+SEI and PTP group was not statistically significant due to the sample size and limits generalizability. Another limit of this study and the program is the requirement that participants are required to have family bonds in the nearby community. This limits the accessibility to many inmates who may not have family or may not have family nearby with the means to visit

regularly. Lastly, generalizability was compromised as all of the participants were repeat offenders and considered high-risk by prison staff. High-risk offenders should not be denied access to reentry programming but by only including high risk repeat offenders this study cannot speak to the results the programs may have on low risk and/or first time offenders.

### **Skejby Halfway House Reintegration Program**

Minke (2011) addressed previous research surrounding the effect of differential association on prisoners. Differential association is a theory that suggests that criminal behavior is learned through social interactions (Sutherland, Cressey, & Luckenbill, 1992). The Skejby Half-Way House seeks to use alternative means to imprisonment in order to rehabilitate offenders. Minke's (2001) quasi-experiment joins offenders with non-offending surrogates in a half-way house and uses the social support of non-offenders as a means of reentry for offenders. The quasi-experiment compares the Skejby treatment group (n=330) against a control group (n=3,041) over a two year follow up study (Minke, 2011). Selection bias is addressed by taking several background variables into account (age, length of stay, level of education, serious prior convictions, and conviction charges) and formulating a hazard function for each participant (Minke, 2011).

Recidivism is defined as violations leading to any kind of sanction including fines and withdrawal of charges; violations leading to imprisonment; violations of the penal code; violations against other persons including homicide, assault, sexual offenses, robbery, and arson all within two years post release (Minke, 2011).

The Skejby half-way house is a part of a system of 180 half-way houses located throughout Denmark that usually involves work release, individual therapy, counseling, and

community reintegration (Minke, 2011). The placement of offenders in individual half-way houses is generally determined by either Prison and Probation Services or a social worker. Offenders are typically placed within reasonable distance to family and employment or education. There are men and women half-way houses and in some houses children and live with their parents (Minke, 2011).

Skejby is a 25 bed half-way house for men and women with half of the residents being non-offenders. Non-offenders are generally students studying law, journalism, nursing etc. Offenders and non-offenders are divided into four groups with two staff members assigned to each group. Twelve staff members were assigned to Skejby, six men and six women, who are trained as prison guards, social workers, or educators. The groups share household duties and responsibilities as well as hold meetings regarding group welfare and social dynamics (Minke, 2011).

Minke (2011) hypothesizes that participation in the Skejby half-way house will reduce recidivism by integrating offenders into prosocial roles within the community. Results from the two-year follow up reveal that recidivism of any type (including traffic offenses) is 50 percent among prior Skejby residents and 61 percent for the control group; recidivism for crimes leading to imprisonment is 30 percent among prior Skejby residents and 40 percent for the control group (Minke, 2011). Participation in the Skejby half-way house, however, had no impact on recidivism on offenses against other persons (homicide, battery, assault, sexual offenses, and/or robbery).

In this study the results are limited because inmates are placed in Skejby, and other half-way houses, according to pre-prison associations such as family and work. This placement brings

offenders closer to their old communities where there is not only potential family support but also triggers to antisocial behavior. This access to the offenders' familiar community may skew the results, making it difficult to determine if it is the connection with the prosocial residents or to the community that impacts the reentry of the offenders. The access to the offenders' old community may negatively impact reentry by allowing offenders to return to antisocial behavior and associations while in the Skejby half-way house.

### **Creating Lasting Family Connections**

McKiernan, Shamblen, Collins, Strader, & Kokoski (2012) examine the impact of familial connections on recidivism and reentry by evaluating the Creating Lasting Family Connections (CLFC) program for newly released felons and their families. McKiernan et al., (2012) cited research that recognizes the strain imprisonment has on families such as removing the incarcerated family member from the household, forcing the family to adjust to life without the incarcerated parents, and the adjustment for the family and offender when he/she returns to the household and resumes responsibilities (Apel, Blokland, Niewbeerta, & Schellen, 2010; Nelson & Phipps, 2000; Visher, 2007).

The Creating Lasting Family Connections program seeks to reduce recidivism by strengthening returning offenders' relationships with their families through 20 two hour classes offered once or twice a week. The classes seek to improve several relationship skills that will assist returning offenders' transition into family life and reduce recidivism (McKiernan et al., 2012). Selection bias is addressed by employing the Heckman two-step procedure which accounted for risk factors associated with recidivism (such as race) and attrition (McKiernan et al., 2012).

McKiernan and colleagues (2012) define recidivism as revocation, rearrests or absconded at waves two and three of the program. McKiernan and colleagues (2012) hypothesize that by participating in Creating Lasting Family Connections, offenders will improve in the following areas: (a) communication skills, (b) conflict resolution, (c) intrapersonal skills, (d) emotional awareness, (e) interpersonal skills, (f) relationship satisfaction, and (g) relationship commitment while also reducing recidivism.

Results from the study revealed the following: Creating Lasting Family Connections participants (n=387) saw a significant increase in the above mentioned dimensions of relationship skills compared to the control group (n=113) which saw no change in relationships skills from pretest and follow up (McKiernan et al., 2012). The Creating Lasting Family Connections group had a 24 percent increase in communication skills; 18 percent increase in conflict resolution skills; 21 percent increase in intrapersonal skills; 25 percent increase in emotional awareness; 24 percent increase in emotional expression; 24 increase in interpersonal skills; 23 increase in relationship management skills; 21 increase in relationship satisfaction; 16 percent increase in relationship commitment; 29 percent increase in overall relationship skills (an average of the nine prior skills). The abovementioned areas of relationship skill improvement Relationship skill growth was measured by a self-report questionnaire, involving 71 items inquiring about various relationship qualities using a scale between one (being strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). The questionnaire is completed by Creating Lasting Family Connections participants and the end of each wave of classes. Results from the study indicate that the control group was 2.94 times more likely to recidivate than the Creating Lasting Family Connections group (McKiernan et al., 2012).

A key component of the Creating Lasting Family Connections program is comprehensive case management services offered to participants and the families of participants. This component, though beneficial for participants, is a limitation for the research on Creating Lasting Family Connections. Because participants receive comprehensive case management it is difficult to determine how influential these services are in comparison to the relationship skill/family strengthening. The case management in Creating Lasting Family Connections sought to overcome common barriers for offenders returning to the community by providing referrals to other services in the community, job search skills, child care, and transportation (McKiernan et al., 2012).

## DISCUSSION

The purpose of this paper was to review the various types of recidivism prevention interventions that emphasize prosocial support. The journal articles included in the review focus on the importance of family, spousal, friend, and surrogate support when reentering the community. Through this systematic review of empirical research of recidivism prevention through prosocial support, research has shown the benefits of allowing offenders to fortify social ties to the community. The review found the following: (a) the majority of interventions (six out of eight) took place, at least partially, in the community; (b) the sample sizes, with the exception of one study, were adequate; (c) offenders who are able to expand or strengthen social ties in the community see an improved likelihood of successful reentry; (d) all of the studies utilized a control group, (e) six of the eight studies had a follow up period of two or more years. The studies are also reviewed using the Maryland Scale of Scientific Methods (MSSM) developed by Sherman et al. (1998). This scale determines the threat of internal validity using the following factors: (1) *Causal direction*, the question of whether the crime caused the program to be present or the program caused the observed level of crime, (2) *History*, the passage of time or other factors external to the program that may have caused a change in crime rather than the prevention program itself, (3) *Chance factors*, or events within the program group (such as imprisoning a few active offenders), that could have been the true cause of any measured change in crime (4) *Selection bias*, or factors characterizing the group receiving a program, that independently affect the observed level of crime (Sherman et al.,1998).

The studies in this review were rated using the MSSM criteria to determine strength of the study. All of the studies reviewed in this paper were rated at level three with the exception of



the study on the Reasoning and Rehabilitation Programme (Martin et al., 2010) that was rated at level four. The results of the MSSM application on the studies, as well as a comparison of the studies are found in the appendix.

### **Limitations and Challenges**

A significant limitation of the studies reviewed in this paper was the inclusion of multiple definitions of recidivism. The purpose of this review is to compare several interventions which focused on recidivism prevention through prosocial support. Each study had a different definition of recidivism whereas some studies did not include a complete definition at all. A second limitation was the inclusion of various prosocial support types (immediate family, extended family, friends, spouses and/or mentors) without evidence showing how each type impacted recidivism specifically with the exception of two studies. The Minnesota Department of Corrections (2011) research on prison visitation reveal that visitations from some support groups, such as mentors, clergy and in-laws, greatly reduced recidivism while other support groups, such as friends, had a less significant impact on reducing recidivism. Mears et. al (2012) also find that different social groups have varying impact on recidivism. Spouses have the highest success in reducing recidivism while other family, excluding significant others, had the lowest success in reducing recidivism. Lastly, when a social worker or trained volunteer became a part of the intervention, with the exception of Minke's (2011) study on the Skejby Half-way House, the extent of training or role was not discussed. This is a limitation because without knowing the extent of training or the role of the social worker it becomes difficult to know how much of an influence case management had on recidivism versus the impact of the prosocial support of the intervention.

## **Implications for Social Work Practice and Research**

Prisoner reentry and recidivism prevention have social work implications at the micro, mezzo and macro levels. Micro level interventions are interventions focused at the individual level, such as case management and referrals, mental health and addiction counseling, and abuse investigations (Kirst-Ashman & Hull, 2012). In terms of recidivism prevention micro level case management is critical. Referrals to local resources including mental health and addictions counseling, employment assistance, housing and temporary financial support play a vital role in successful reentry into the community (Wheeler & Patterson, 2008). At a clinical level Mezzo interventions are those interventions aimed at working with small groups and families (Kirst-Ashman, Hull, 2012). Recidivism prevention at the mezzo level should focus on interventions such as family counseling, and securing family based resources such as utility payment assistance, daycare to allow for visitation while incarcerated or job searches and employment while community dwelling (Wheeler & Patterson, 2008). Both micro and mezzo interventions require social workers to participate in community-level assessments of available resources and enable community collaborations to meet the needs of this population (Delgado, 2001; Wheeler & Patterson, 2008; Wikoff, Linhorst, & Morani, 2012). Macro level interventions refer to interventions that are used to work with large systems, including organizations and communities (Kirst-Ashman, Hull, 2012). Macro level interventions for recidivism are typically focused on the policy advocacy level. Social workers should advocate for Second Chance Act funding to help develop reentry programs that are both eligible for this funding and meet the micro, mezzo and macro needs of the community (Wikoff et al., 2012).

In 2013 the Second Chance Act of 2008 was reauthorized for funding up to the 2018 fiscal year and additional funding was granted to family-centered planning (S. Res. 1690, 2013). The research reviewed in this paper suggests that reentry planning that focuses on family programming was less successful when compared to programming that focused on surrogate support programming (Baumer et al., 2009; Minnesota Department of Corrections [DOC], 2011; Minke, 2011; Mears et al., 2011; McKiernan et al., 2012; LeClair, 1978; Duwe & King, 2012; Martin et al., 2010). Funding for family-centered program is also given priority in the Second Chance Reauthorization act of 2013 (S. Res. 1690, 2013). Future research is needed to determine if funding is being appropriately used to maintain family-centered programs versus surrogate-centered programming.

There is a need for reentry and recidivism prevention interventions to include community-based prosocial support that begins before release (Baumer et al., 2009; Berg & Huedner, 2011; Duwe & King, 2012). Prison visitation, though adaptable to many institutional settings, faces several policy barriers (Monahan, Goldweber, & Cauffman, 2010). These barriers include the location of prisons, administrative visitation policies, and the uncomfortable setting in which visitation takes place (Austin & Hardyman, 2004; Sturges, 2002). Many prisons are located outside of major cities and commuting to the facilities is an obstacle for many families of prisoners (Austin & Hardyman, 2004). Administrative visitation policy barriers include background checks for all visitors, limited visiting hours during the week and weekends, limited visits per week, limited time allowed per visit, and only allowing inmates in minimum custody access to visitation privileges (Austin & Hardyman, 2004). Lastly, uncomfortable settings are created intentionally by prison administration to discourage visitation (Austin & Hardyman,

2004). Visitors who travel long distances have to endure long wait times, invasive pat-down and background checks in order to have a one to two hour visit. Visiting area's generally lack privacy and are held in areas such as cafeteria's or other open spaces where inmates and visitors must share the space with others (Sturges, 2002). This environment makes it difficult for inmates to having meaningful conversations with visitors (Hardyman, 2004). While visitation does appear to reduce recidivism risk, more research is needed on how prison policies can be adapted to meet the needs of visitors and inmates. (Mears et al., 2011; Minnesota Department of Corrections [DOC], 2011; Cochran, 2013).

## **APPENDIX**

**Table 1: Empirical Literature on the Effects of Prosocial Support Programs**

**Table 1: Empirical Literature on the Effects of Prosocial Support Programs**

<i>Citation</i>	Program Location	Program Duration	Prosocial Tie	Sample Size	Findings	Study Limitations	MSSM Ranking
<i>LeClair (1978)</i>	Community during incarceration	Not addressed	Family, friends, potential employers and spouses	<u>1973 (n=610)</u> furlough group: n=78 control group: n=268  <u>1974 (n=841)</u> furlough group: n=621 control group: n=220	1973-recidivism was reduced by 11%. 1974-recidivism reduced by 15%	Furloughs not random Selection bias	3
<i>Baumer, O'Donnell, and Hughes (2009)</i>	Community during incarceration	5-20 days	Family visitation	19,955 inmates	The intervention group recidivated 5% less than the control group	Furloughs not random Selection bias Recidivism not defined	3
<i>Martín, Hernández, Hernández-Fernaud, Arregui, and Hernández (2010)</i>	While in Prison	35 two hour sessions	Family, friends, and employers	N=117 repeat offenders (87 male, 30 female) PTP group: n=55, PTP+SEI group: n=12, Control group: n=50	74.5% of the PTP group did not reoffend 83.3% of the PTP+SEI group did not offend 56% of the control group did not reoffend	Small sample size Study only included high risk offenders Program only available to inmates who have local family bonds	4
<i>Minke (2011)</i>	Skejby half-way house in Denmark	23 weeks	"Non-criminal" members of community University Students	N=3,371 Skejby residents: n=330, Control group: n=3,041	The intervention group recidivated at a rate 21% lower than the control group	Unclear if success is related to program or placement near strong family ties	3

**Table 1: Empirical Literature on the Effects of Prosocial Support Programs**

<i>Minnesota Department of Corrections (2011)</i>	Within Minnesota State prisons	Average of 36, or two visits per month during the entire length of stay	Spouse (or ex) Any family member Friends Clergy	N= 16,420  visited group: n=10016  control group: n=6403	Recidivism risk reduction by relationship Mentor: 29% Clergy: 24% In-law: 21% Sibling: 10% Other relatives: 9% Friend: 7% Ex-spouse: increase risk	Race was dichotomized (white, minority)	3
<i>Duwe and King (2012)</i>	Phase one - during incarceration  Phase two-in the community	18 months  12 months after release	Faith-based volunteers from the community	N= 13,484 inmates  InnerChange group: n=366  control group: n=13,188	InnerChange completion resulted in a 26% reduction for rearrests,  35% reduction for reconvictions,  40% reduction for incarceration for a new crime	Lack of female offenders	3
<i>Mears, Cochran, Siennick and Bales (2012)</i>	Within Florida state prisons	12 months or fewer	Family (nonspecific) and/or friend visits	N= 3,903  visited group: n=2057  control group: n=1846	Spouse/Significant other visit: 9.6% reduction  Friend visit: 8.3% reduction;  family recidivism: not statistically	Did not include visits from clergy or community volunteers  recidivism was not operationally defined	3
<i>McKiernan, Shamblen, Collins, Strader and Kokoski (2012)</i>	In community (n=389)  During incarceration (n=11)	20 sessions delivered in 2 hour classes provided once or twice a week	Inmates individual family (spouses, parents, children)	N=500 inmates  CLFC group: n=387  control group: n=113	Control group recidivism 2.94% higher than intervention group	difficult to ascertain whether results are from visits or case management  no measureable time frame	3

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