

# Are Your Friends Crucial or Trivial? Peer Support's Effect on Recidivism



**Caitlin Taylor and Patricia Becker<sup>1</sup>**

Justice Policy Journal • Volume 12, Number 1 (Spring)

© Center on Juvenile and Criminal Justice 2015 • [www.cjcj.org/jpj](http://www.cjcj.org/jpj)

## Abstract

This study used a data set from the Serious and Violent Reentry Initiative evaluation to measure the effect of peer instrumental support on recidivism. To examine recidivism, this study looked at self-reported criminal activity as well as new arrests in the first 15 months after release. Peer instrumental support was recorded at three different time periods: one to three months, three to nine months, and nine to 15 months post release. Logistic regression models were conducted to examine the relationship between peer support and recidivism. The results showed that peer support had no significant effect on recidivism in any of the three waves; however, other variables, such as, victimization frequency and the need for alcohol and drug treatment significantly predicted recidivism. A number of implications are discussed for policies and practices within the criminal justice system and future research.

---

<sup>1</sup> La Salle University

**Corresponding Author:**

Caitlin Taylor

Email: [taylorc@lasalle.edu](mailto:taylorc@lasalle.edu)

## Introduction

With the United States making up only five percent of the world's population, but twenty-five percent of the world's incarcerated population, scholarly attention given to the American phenomenon of mass incarceration is certainly justified (Alexander, 2012; Western, 2006; Garland, 2001). In an effort to reduce the scale of mass incarceration, there should be great efforts made by the criminal justice system to understand the challenges of and methods to assist recently released offenders. The need for an array of physical health (Vaughn, DeLisi, Beaver, Perron and Abdon, 2012), mental health (Mallik-Kane and Visher, 2008) and other social services (Visher and Lattimore, 2007; Belenko and Peugh, 2005; La Vigne, Shollenburger and Debus, 2009) also accompanies these released offenders back into the community. Understanding the high recidivism rates and harsh struggles that offenders face while reentering the community, research trying to predict which factors are related to successful reentry and understand these struggles is in high demand.

One factor that may influence recidivism is social support. Social support can be conceptualized as either emotional or instrumental support that the community, networks, and peers can offer to recently released offenders. Even though this information is extremely important, "in criminology the insights linking social support to crime remain disparate, and are not systematized so far as to direct theoretical and empirical investigation" (Cullen, 1994: 529).

With the hopes of gaining needed insight, the current study explored the influence that peer instrumental support has on recidivism. Peer instrumental support measured the scope to which peers can provide or help with finding a place to live, transportation, jobs, and substance abuse treatment. This study used logistic regression to measure the independent effect that peer instrumental support had on recidivism after controlling for other known predictors of recidivism.

## Literature Review

Understanding the vast literature on social support was crucial for completing this study, which solely concentrated on the role that peer support (a more narrow form of social support) had on recidivism. Social support, defined by Lin (1986), is "the perceived or actual instrumental and/or expressive provisions supplied by the community, social networks, and confiding partners" (18). In conjunction with the

work of Lin (1986) and Vaux (1988), Cullen (1994) theorized that social support is comprised of four key dimensions. The first dimension surrounds “the distinction between the objective delivery and the perception of support,” (Cullen, 1994: 530). Objective delivery is when support has actually been received and the perception of support is when support could or would be provided. The second dimension breaks down social support into two forms: instrumental and expressive support. Instrumental support is defined as factors that lead to an outcome like help with finances, finding a job, or transportation. Expressive support is defined as emotional support. Third, the distinction between micro and macro levels refers to whether social support is measured between individuals or at some larger level of aggregation. The fourth dimension describes social support and how it is received. For instance, support can be received from either a formal agency, such as the criminal justice system, or an informal agency, such as peers. These four key dimensions of social support guided the focus of this study. As will be detailed further below, this study explored perceptions of instrumental peer support from individuals released from prison.

Social support has been found to be a critical component in research surrounding health and psychological well-being (Hochstetler, DeLisi, and Pratt, 2010; Iwamoto, Gordon, and Oliveros, 2012; Johnson Listwan, Colvin, Hanley, and Flannery, 2010), crime and recidivism (Cochran, 2013; Broome, Knight, Hiller, and Simpson, 1996; Cobbina, Huebner, and Berg, 2012; Martinez and Abrams, 2013; Taylor, 2012), as well as drug and alcohol abuse (Rowe, Bellamy, Baranoski, Wieland, O’Connell, Benedict, Davidson, Buchanan and Sells, 2007; Warner-Robbins and Parsons, 2010).

Despite an abundance of research related to social support, comparatively little work has been done on the effects of peer support. Depending upon the specific outcome of interest and the operationalization of peer support, existing research has offered fairly mixed evidence for the relationship. Some research has documented a significant relationship between peer support and recidivism when measured as re-involvement in the criminal justice system. For example, Cochran (2013) examined the relationship between in-prison visitation and recidivism. The number of visits prisoners received at different stages during their sentence were used as a proxy measure of peer support. His analyses revealed that near-release visitation was not significantly related to recidivism, but that prisoners visited early in their prison term and who were visited consistently throughout their prison term were significantly less likely to recidivate than those who were never visited. While the number of visits was only a proxy measure of social support, this study nonetheless suggested that social support may reduce recidivism.

In addition, Broome, Knight, Hiller, and Simpson (1996) investigated peer support by using the Client Evaluation of Self and Treatment for probationers to measure their “similarity to other clients” and “helpfulness of other clients.” Furthermore, they researched connections between peer support and recidivism, measured by official data taken on probationers who completed a 4-month residential substance abuse treatment program. They discovered that probationers who reported higher counselor competence and compatibility with other clients had significantly lower rearrest rates. As well, probationers who saw other clients as “helpful” showed a lower likelihood of recidivism. Despite the fact that peer support was only examined between the probationer and other clients or counselors, this study’s findings still suggest that positive peer support could lower the risk of recidivism.

While focusing on family support as opposed to peer support, recent work by Taylor (in press) is also relevant to the current study. This study concluded that higher levels of emotional family support produced a significant decrease in self-reported recidivism as well as new arrests; however, instrumental family support did not significantly affect either measure of recidivism.

Other work had examined the relationship between social support and relapse with drugs and alcohol. Rowe et al. (2007) used 114 adult participants with serious mental illnesses in a clinical trial in which one group received standard services and the intervention group received group and peer support. Three different types of group and social support were used: citizenship intervention, which included formal support from resources in the community and informal support from the neighborhood; peer mentor, a source of inspiration and social support to support sobriety; and citizenship classes, a form of education to show participants the different resources available and to show how to establish social networks. They discovered that the experimental group that received citizenship intervention showed significantly lower levels of alcohol use during the follow up period and the citizenship intervention group also produced lower levels of alcohol use. However, all three groups exhibited decreases in drug use, as well as, new criminal charges. These findings reveal that social support can significantly influence alcohol use, but not drug use or reoffending.

Comparably, Warner-Robbins and Parsons (2010) conducted research on 315 women recently released from jail or prison who participated in the program Welcome Home (WHM), which focused on peer support through peer mentor coordinators, community peer case managers, peer leaders on reentry support teams, peer leaders of community outreach teams, and prison chaplains. Warner-Robbins and Parsons (2010) concluded that women in this program had notably

low rates of drug use and criminal justice system involvement with less than two percent of the women reporting substance use and less than four percent reporting any criminal justice system involvement. Although this research specifically focused on the WHM program and had no comparison group, the findings did suggest that peer support may reduce substance use and involvement in the criminal justice system.

Along with looking at recidivism and relapse, a selection of studies have considered the relationship between social or peer support and health and well-being among those involved in the justice system. For example, Hochstetler, DeLisi, and Pratt (2010) examined how social support influenced hostility and prisoner reentry into the community. Social support was measured by whether the respondent had friends or family that could loan them money, that would listen to their problems or help them stay out of trouble. The research concluded that inmates who experienced prison as a harsh place and who did not have peers to rely on for support, may be more likely to hold on to their prison experiences and display hostility while reintegrating back into society. Even though this study focused on measures of hostility instead of new criminal offending, the findings were consistent with the importance of social support and successful reintegration into the community.

Other research has found that social support is related to a variety of positive outcomes concerning mental health for incarcerated populations. For instance, Iwamoto Gordon, and Oliveros (2012) found that informal support was associated with a reduction in depression and anxiety symptoms of incarcerated men in minimum security prerelease facilities. Another example that explored the relationship between social support and health and well-being, found that social support had a significant positive effect on psychological well-being among incarcerated men (Johnson Listwan, Colvin, Hanley, & Flannery, 2010).

Making a connection exclusively between criminal peers and recidivism, Martinez and Abrams (2013) conducted a metasynthesis of 13 studies surrounding informal social support among young offenders. One theme found in their study was “walking a fine line,” which indicated “confronting old friend and old ways,” “selective involvement and limiting associations,” and “easy money and the support of gangs,” (175). They came to the conclusion that, “Peer supports were not experienced as positive or negative per se but, rather, as a stream of possibilities offering positive benefits such as money, familiarity, and support, and also routes to undesirable ends such as illegal activity and further involvement with the criminal justice system,” (180).

An example of how peer relationships can lead to negative outcomes is when these relationships are with criminal peers. Cobbina, Huebner, and Berg (2012) measured the time to first arrest following men and women's release from prison. They concluded that men with criminal peers were rearrested faster, which shows that "peer relationships influence re-offending," (349). Their study also found that "Men's risk for recidivism is strongly related to whether they associate with others who engage in criminal activity" (349).

In sum, prior research had explored the relationship between social support and recidivism (Martinez and Abrams, 2013; Cochran, 2013; Taylor, 2012; Broome, Knight, Hiller and Simpson, 1996; Cobbina, Huebner, and Berg, 2012) as well as peer support and substance abuse relapse (Rowe et al. 2007; Warner-Robbins and Parsons 2010; Hochstetler, DeLisi, and Pratt 2010; Iwamoto Gordon, and Oliveros 2012; Johnson Listwan, Colvin, Hanley, and Flannery 2010). However, a significant gap continues to exist related to the effect that peer support has on recidivism. While some prior research suggests that peer support could open the door to different opportunities, both positive and negative, this current study seeks to more closely measure the extent of the association between positive peer support and recidivism.

## **Research Question and Hypotheses**

The primary research question investigated in the current study was whether or not higher levels of peer support have an independent effect on recidivism. After controlling for other predictors of recidivism, we hypothesized that individuals with higher levels of peer instrumental support in all waves would be less likely to have recently reoffended. More precisely, we predicted that individuals with higher levels of peer support in any wave would be less likely to have committed any crime and would be less likely to have been arrested.

## **Methods**

The data set used in this study was part of the evaluation of the Serious and Violent Offender Reentry Initiative (SVORI). Participants in this evaluation were interviewed 30 days before they were released from state prison, as well as three, nine and 15 months after they were released. This evaluation included approximately 1,700 males and over 350 females; however, for this particular study only the males were examined (see Lattimore and Steffey, 2009; Lattimore and Visser, 2009; 2011 for more on the SVORI data set).

Two different types of recidivism were measured: self-reported crimes and official arrest data. Self-reported crimes were measured by asking respondents to report if they engaged in any type of crime during the three different time periods. To measure if there were any new arrests, the SVORI evaluation used data from state Department of Corrections/Probation and Parole agencies and the National Crime Information Center (NCIC). Peer instrumental support was measured by asking respondents a series of questions. The questions determined if respondents had a friend who could provide advice on a place to live, finding a job, transportation, substance abuse treatment, and financial support. While space does not permit a description of all control variables, two control variables that proved significant over multiple time periods were the need for alcohol and drug treatment and victimization frequency. The measurement used for the need for alcohol or drug treatments were self-reported by the respondents. To measure victimization frequency respondents were asked: Were you threatened with being hit? Was anything thrown at you? Were you pushed/grabbed/shoved? Were you slapped/kicked/bitten/hit with fist? Were you threatened with a weapon/ was a weapon used on you? Since some of these questions were more severe than others, the questions were weighted to take into consideration the severity of each (details on other control variables can be found in CITATION SUPPRESSED FOR BLIND PEER REVIEW).

Logistic regression models were completed to predict self-reported crimes and official arrests. Listwise deletion was used to handle missing data in all models. The temporal ordering of relationships examined in this study also requires explanation. Peer instrumental support reported at wave two was used to predict reoffending in the three months after release. Levels of peer support reported at wave three were used to predict reoffending in the three to nine months after release and finally peer support reported at wave four was used to predict reoffending in the nine to 15 month time period. While it would have been preferable to use measures of peer instrumental support reported at wave two to predict reoffending in the subsequent time period (three to nine months after release), this would mean that respondents would have needed to complete two consecutive waves to be included in the study. This direction of relationships was used because the extent of missing data was already problematic.

## **Results**

Descriptive statistics for all independent and dependent variables are shown in Table 1. The mean levels of peer support reported at the three different times periods ranged from 9.43 to 9.71, which were relatively high considering the

maximum value of 15. Between 17 and 30 percent of participants were re-arrested and rates of self-reported crimes ranged from 23 to 38 percent over subsequent interview waves.

**Table 1** Descriptive Statistics

	<b>N</b>	<b>Min</b>	<b>Max</b>	<b>M</b>	<b>SD</b>
Peer Instrumental Support					
Wave 2	948	0	15	9.61	3.868
Wave 3	955	0	15	9.43	3.749
Wave 4	887	0	15	9.71	3.586
Committed Any Self-Reported Crime					
Wave 2	984	0	1	.23	.423
Wave 3	1035	0	1	.38	.486
Wave 4	1113	0	1	.37	.482
Any Arrest					
Wave 2	1581	0	1	.17	.375
Wave 3	1581	0	1	.32	.468
Wave 4	1581	0	1	.30	.460
Need for Alcohol and Drug Treatment					
Wave 2	984	0	1	.22	.413
Wave 3	1032	0	1	.29	.455
Wave 4	1112	0	1	.32	.465
Support Self with Job					
Wave 2	983	0	1	.62	.486
Wave 3	983	0	1	.69	.464
Wave 4	922	0	1	.66	.472
Family Emotional Support					
Wave 2	959	0	30	22.36	4.885
Wave 3	955	2	30	21.56	4.961
Wave 4	901	2	30	21.59	4.876
Family Instrumental support					
Wave 2	960	0	15	11.42	2.942
Wave 3	957	0	15	11.02	3.008
Wave 4	902	0	15	10.97	2.951
Criminogenic neighborhood					
Wave 2	983	0	10	2.70	2.827
Wave 3	984	0	10	2.98	3.026
Wave 4	921	0	10	2.97	3.041
Victimization frequency					
Wave 2	984	0	8	.38	.906
Wave 3	1035	0	10	.64	1.255
Wave 4	1113	0	10	.58	1.207
Re-incarceration Status					
Incarcerated at wave 2 interview	984	0	1	.07	.259



Incarcerated at wave 3 interview	1035	0	1	.26	.441
Incarcerated at wave 4 interview	1113	0	1	.35	.477
Services received					
Wave 2	984	0	9	1.24	1.319
Wave 3	985	0	7	1.11	1.198
Wave 4	921	0	8	.87	1.048
Prior Convictions	1658	1	3	1.94	.801
Complied with Probation or Parole					
Wave 2	751	1	5	1.16	.529
Wave 3	633	1	5	1.26	.672
Wave 4	525	1	5	1.38	.856
PO Case Management					
Wave 2	801	0	10	4.49	2.519
Wave 3	662	0	10	4.67	2.587
Wave 4	516	0	10	4.62	2.417
Married or Steady Relationship					
Wave 2	983	0	1	.57	.495
Wave 3	1035	0	1	.64	.481
Wave 4	1113	0	1	.57	.495
Residence with Family					
Wave 2	983	0	1	.79	.406
Wave 3	1032	0	1	.81	.392
Wave 4	1110	0	1	.80	.404
Legal Cynicism					
Wave 2	983	0	10	2.80	2.587
Wave 3	1035	0	10	2.86	2.661
Wave 4	1113	0	10	2.88	2.688
Age					
Wave 2	984	18	69	29.73	7.280
Wave 3	1035	19	70	29.95	7.153
Wave 4	1113	19	70	30.46	7.116
Race					
Wave 2 Black	984	0	1	.55	.498
Wave 2 White	984	0	1	.35	.477
Wave 3 Black	1033	0	1	.53	.499
Wave 3 White	1033	0	1	.37	.484
Wave 4 Black	1112	0	1	.52	.500
Wave 4 White	1112	0	1	.39	.487

The bivariate analyses showed the difference between mean levels of peer support and self-reported crimes, as well as official arrests. The results are displayed in Table 2. The mean levels of peer support were not significantly different for those who reoffended and those who did not except for self-reported crimes at wave four.

**Table 2** Mean Levels of Instrumental Peer Support for Recidivists and Non-Recidivists

	N	M (SD)	N	M (SD)
	New Arrest		No New Arrest	
3 months post-release	119	9.39 (4.034)	769	9.64 (3.847)
3-9 months post-release	239	9.52 (3.756)	649	9.63 (3.915)
9-15 months post-release	254	9.37 (3.870)	634	9.70 (3.871)
	Any Self-Reported Crime		No Self-Reported Crime	
3 months post-release	219	9.40 (4.076)	729	9.67 (3.804)
3-9 months post-release	373	9.22 (3.839)	582	9.57 (3.687)
9-15 months post-release	354	9.31 (3.610)*	533	9.98 (3.547)

\*p<.05

While the bivariate analyses compared differences in means for those who reoffended and those who did not, multivariate analyses allowed for an examination of the independent effects of peer support after controlling for other likely predictors of recidivism. As shown in Tables 3 and 4, several of the control variables had significant effects on self-reported crimes and official arrest records; however, peer support proved insignificant in all three waves and with both outcome variables.

**Table 3** Logistic Regression Predicting Any Self-Reported Crimes

	3 Months Post-Release	3 to 9 Months Post-Release	9 to 15 Months Post-Release
	Exp( $\beta$ )	Exp( $\beta$ )	Exp( $\beta$ )
N	743	598	477
Peer Instrumental Support	1.018	1.052	1.010
Prior Convictions	1.366*	1.188	1.279
Age	.945*	.947*	.963*
Race- White	.998	1.121	.863
Race-Black	.643	.619	.389*
Support Self- Job	.933	.650	.621
Services Received	.929	.983	1.217
Residence with Family	1.202	.955	1.297
Crim. Neighborhood	1.059	1.124*	1.158*
PO Case Management	.972	1.055	1.085
Legal Cynicism	1.035	1.047	1.021
Family Emotional Support	.907*	.994	.931
Family Instrumental Support	1.143*	.996	1.026
Married/Steady Relationship	1.037	.766	.952
Victimization Frequency	1.506**	1.695**	1.568**
Need AOD Treatment	3.869**	4.394**	4.353**

Re-Incarcerated	6.818**	4.290**	3.141**
Constant	.575	.464	.879
Model $\chi^2$	164.571**	198.167**	171.896**
Nagelkerke $R^2$	.312	.395	.419

\*\*p < .01, \*p < .05

**Table 4** Logistic Regression Models Predicting Any Arrest (NCIC)

	3 Months Post-Release	3 to 9 Months Post-Release	9 to 15 Months Post-Release
	Exp( $\beta$ )	Exp( $\beta$ )	Exp( $\beta$ )
N	704	571	451
Peer Support	1.040	1.021	.962
Prior Convictions	1.062	1.232	1.123
Age	.977	.954	.980
Race- White	.672	.952	.731
Race-Black	2.551	1.635	1.472
Support Self- Job	.352**	.619	.867
Services Received	.888	1.202	1.094
Residence with Family	.824	1.561	.642
Crim. Neighborhood	1.015	1.037	1.078
PO Case Management	.997	.990	.989
Legal Cynicism	1.028	1.049	1.045

---

Family Emotional Support	.981	1.028	.910*
Family Instrumental Support	1.034	.910	1.120
Married/Steady Relationship	.712	1.006	1.183
Victimization Frequency	1.428*	1.225*	1.223
Need AOD Treatment	1.199	1.983*	1.171
Re-Incarcerated	14.736**	6.439**	6.224**
Constant	.146	.196	.875
Model $\chi^2$	101.776**	114.100**	91.799**
Nagelkerke $R^2$	.268	.284	.270

---

\*\*p < .01, \*p < .05

While not a main focus of this study, victimization frequency was significant in all three time periods for self-reported crimes and significant in wave two and three for official arrest records. When examining the models for any self-reported crimes, a one unit increase in the frequency of victimization was associated with a 51 to 70 percent increase in the likelihood of reoffending over subsequent waves. Similarly, more frequent victimization experiences increased the likelihood of being arrested by 23 to 43 percent over interview waves.

Furthermore, the need for alcohol and drug treatment increased the rate of self-reported crimes between 287 and 339 percent in all three time periods. However, the need for alcohol and drug treatment only increased the likelihood of arrest in three to nine months post release.

## Discussion

### *Interpretation of Findings*

The original hypothesis was that higher levels of peer instrumental support would decrease the likelihood of reoffending for individuals recently released from state prisons. However, the results showed that peer instrumental support was only significant at the bivariate level, but not at the multivariate level. In the bivariate analyses, mean levels of peer instrumental support were significantly lower for those who reported reoffending in wave four compared to those who did not. Also, peer support was only significant in the bivariate analyses at wave four for self-reported crimes. However, in the multivariate analysis, peer instrumental support was not significant in any wave for the models using both self-reported reoffending and any arrest as the dependent variables.

The finding that peer instrumental support proved insignificant to reoffending during the multivariate analysis was consistent with some other empirical research on instrumental support among recent releasees. For instance, Taylor (2012) discovered that instrumental *family* support had no significant relationship to recidivism.

In contrast, when looking at other research that had recognized the significance of peer support on reoffending (see Cochran, 2013; Broome, Knight, Hiller, & Simpson, 1996; Cobbina, Huebner, and Berg, 2012), it was surprising that peer support did not significantly predict reoffending in this study. One possible explanation for this was that peer support in the current study was measured differently than in other empirical research. For example, Cochran (2013) examined the time of visitation along with the number of visits as measures of support. Likewise, other research measured the observed *emotional* aspect of peer support through the use of peer mentors, counselors, compatibility with other clients, and peer leaders (Broome, Knight, Hiller, & Simpson, 1996; Warner-Robbins & Parsons, 2010; Rowe et al., 2007; and Wilkinson, 2005). However, the current study measured peer instrumental support by examining the likelihood of a friend being able to provide certain things like transportation, advice on housing and jobs, financial support, and substance abuse treatment. This difference in the measurement of peer support may account for the insignificant effect of peer instrumental support found in this study. Although prior research measured peer support differently, respondents in this study may have perceived their peers fulfilling this emotional sense of peer support, as measured in the prior research. However, the questions they were specifically asked in this study did not account for this emotional aspect peer support.

Despite the main objective being peer support, some other consistent predictor variables are worth noting. Experiencing more frequent victimization and needing substance abuse treatment produced rather large effects on recidivism. These findings are relevant in light of other research that showed the importance of substance abuse treatment and social support had on recidivism (Rowe et al., 2007; and Warner-Robbins & Parsons, 2010).

### *Limitations*

One major limitation for this study dealt with the type of respondents, recently released offenders, and how they are known to be a difficult to reach population. Even though large gaps were present between the number of respondents who answered the questions at the interview and the total number of respondents in the study, this type of study was possibly less affected because of the three different time periods studied. For instance, conducting analyses using data from wave two did not require the same respondent to be present for wave three or four.

While this study examined peer instrumental support, there was unfortunately no measurement available for peer emotional support. Knowing the relationship between this type of support and recidivism documented in prior research (Taylor, 2012), perhaps the same significant effect would appear in this study or peer support, if such a measure were available.

A final limitation of this study was the temporal order of relationships that were examined. The measure of peer support at each given wave was used to determine the effect it had on recidivism in the prior time period. This temporal ordering was needed because there would have been an even greater amount of missing data if there was a requirement for the same person to be present for two consecutive interviews. Therefore, this study was not able to use peer support to predict future recidivism. Even though this may be viewed as a significant limitation, it was important to note that there were only minimal differences between the mean levels peer support at each wave.

### *Policy Implications*

The findings concerning peer instrumental support allow for different suggestions to be made regarding policies within the criminal justice system. If instrumental support from peers is insufficient for reducing reoffending, perhaps greater emphasis should be placed on different social services and community programs

providing adequate instrumental support for recently released offenders. Prior research suggests that community-based social service supports can dramatically reduce recidivism (see Seiter & Kadela, 2003).

Also, the significant effect that frequency of victimization and the need for alcohol and drug treatment had on recidivism suggests that social services are critically important and should not be eliminated. Counseling or other psychological services should be available for victims while in prison and after release. Such services can help offenders deal with and overcome the victimization they experienced in a more healthy way (see Zlotnick, Najavits, Rohsenow & Johnson, 2003). As thoroughly documented in other research (see Belenko & Peugh, 2005), this study confirms that there needs to be greater access to drug treatment while in prison and after prison for offenders with substance abuse problems.

### *Future Research*

While this study examined the effect of peer support on recidivism, future research can direct its focus on other related aspects. For example, this study examined the relationship between peer support and recidivism for a sample of males. Future research should examine the effect that peer instrumental support has on recidivism for females to determine if possible gender differences exist.

Additionally, future research should aim to measure peer support through an emotional lens. Prior research proved that emotional peer support is significant when determining reoffending, and if more research on emotional peer support is conducted, then more specific causes of recidivism can be narrowed down. Future research can also examine the effect of both peer instrumental support and peer emotional support together to see if a possible interaction effect exists.

### **Conclusion**

After illuminating the lack of a significant relationship between instrumental peer support and recidivism, efforts should be made to educate offenders on the importance of individual responsibility as well as the availability of existing social services. With the knowledge that higher levels of peer instrumental support did not protect against reoffending, the criminal justice system should aim to establish more social service resources that will ease the reentry process for recently released offenders. Additionally, returning citizens should not expect to rely on



instrumental support from peers as a method to eliminate the likelihood of recidivism.

The goal of this research was to identify significant predictors of recidivism, namely instrumental peer support. While the main variable of interest was not found to be significantly associated with recidivism, the significance of several other variables (such as victimization and substance abuse problems) show that our criminal justice system could be doing more to reduce recidivism and subsequently the size of the prison population. If our society remains on this same path, then our prison population will only grow and offenders who are released will only continue to be rearrested. By expanding access to social services, returning citizens will be better equipped with the right tools to have a successful transition.

## References

- Alexander, M. (2012). *The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in the Age of Colorblindness*. NY: The New Press.
- Belenko, S. & Peugh, J. (2005). Estimating drug treatment needs among state prison inmates. *Drug & Alcohol Dependence, 77*, 269-281.
- Broome, K.M., Knight, K., Hiller, M.L., & Simpson, D.D. (1996). Drug treatment process indicators for probationers and prediction of recidivism. *Journal of Substance Abuse Treatment, 13* (6), 487-491.
- Cobbina, J.E., Huebner, B.M., & Berg, M.T. (2012). Men, women, and postrelease offending: An examination of the nature of the link between relational ties and recidivism. *Crime and Delinquency, 58*, 331-61.
- Cochran, J.C. (2014). Breaches in the wall: Imprisonment, social support, and recidivism. *Journal of Research in Crime and Delinquency, 51*, 200-229.
- Cullen, F. T. (1994). Social support as an organizing concept for criminology: Presidential address to the Academy of Criminal Justice Sciences. *Justice Quarterly, 11*, 527-560.
- Garland, D. (2001). *Mass Imprisonment: Social Causes and Consequences*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Hochstetler, A., DeLisi, M., & Pratt, T. C. (2010). Social support and feelings of hostility among released inmates. *Crime & Delinquency, 56*, 588-607.

- Iwamoto, D. K., Gordon, D., & Oliveros, A. (2012). The role of masculine norms, informal support on depression and anxiety among incarcerated men. *Psychology of Men & Masculinity, 13*(3), 283-293.
- Johnson Listwan, S., Colvin, M., Hanley, D., & Flannery, D. (2010). Victimization, social support, and psychological well-being: A study of recently released prisoners. *Criminal Justice and Behavior, 37*, 1140–1159.
- La Vigne, N.G., Shollenburger, T.L. & Debus, S.A. (2009). *One Year Out: Tracking the Experiences of Male Prisoners Returning to Houston*. Washington, D.C.: Urban Institute.
- Lattimore, P. K. & Steffey, D. M. (2009). *The Multi-Site Evaluation of SVORI: Methodology and Analytic Approach*. Research Triangle Park, NC: RTI International.
- Lattimore, P. K. & Visher, C.A. (2009). *The Multi-Site Evaluation of SVORI: Summary and Synthesis*. Research Triangle Park, NC: RTI International.
- Lattimore, P.K. & Visher, C.A. (2011). SVORI Multi-site Impact Evaluation, 2004-2007. [US] [Computer file]. ICPSR27101-v1. Ann Arbor, MI: Inter-university Consortium for Political and Social Research [distributor], 2011-05-05. doi:10.3886/ICPSR27101.
- Mallik-Kane, K. & Visher, C.A. (2008). *Health and Prisoner Reentry*. Washington, D.C.: Urban.
- Martinez, D.J. & Abrams, L.S. (2013). Informal social support among returning young offenders: A metasynthesis of the literature. *International Journal of Offender Therapy and Comparative Criminology, 57*(2), 169–190
- Rowe, M., Bellamy, C., Baranoski, M., Wieland, M., O'Connell, M.J., Benedict, P., Davidson, L., Buchanan, J., & Sells, D. (2007). A peer-support, group intervention to reduce substance use and criminality among persons with severe mental illness. *Psychiatry Services, 58* (7), 955-961.
- Mulvey, E. P., Steinberg, L., Fagan, J., Cauffman, E., Piquero, A. R., Chassin, L., and Losoya, S. H. (2004). Theory and research on desistance from antisocial activity among serious adolescent offenders. *Youth Violence and Juvenile Justice, 2*, 213-236.
- Seiter, R.P. & Kadela, K. (2003). Prisoner reentry: What works, what does not and what is promising. *Crime & Delinquency, 49*, 360-388.

- Taylor, C.J. (in press). The Family's Role in the Reintegration of Formerly Incarcerated Individuals: The Direct Effects of Emotional Support. *The Prison Journal*.
- Taylor, C.J. (2012). *Family support and the successful reentry of formerly incarcerated individuals*. Doctoral dissertation. Philadelphia, PA: Temple University.
- Vaughn, M.G., DeLisi, M., Beaver, K.M., Perron, B.E. & Abdon, A. (2012). Toward a criminal justice epidemiology: Behavioral and physical health of probationers and parolees in the United States. *Journal of Criminal Justice*, 40, 165-173.
- Visher, C.A. & Lattimore, P.K. (2007). Major study examines prisoners and their reentry needs. *NIJ Journal*, 258, 30-33.
- Visher, C., & Travis, J. (2003). Transitions from prison to community: understanding individual pathways. 2003. *Annual Review of Sociology*, 29, 89-113.
- Warner-Robbins, C. & Parsons, M.L. (2010). Developing peer leaders and reducing recidivism through long-term participation in a faith-based program: The story of Welcome Home Ministries. *Alcoholism Treatment Quarterly*, 28, 293-305.
- Western, B. (2006). *Punishment and Inequality in America*. NY: Russell Sage Foundation.
- Wilkinson, R. A. (2005). Engaging communities: An essential ingredient to offenderreentry. *Corrections Today*, 67, 86-89.
- Wolff, N., & Draine, J. (2004). Dynamics of social capital of prisoners and community reentry: ties that bind? *Journal of Correctional Health Care*, 10(3), 457-490.
- Zlotnick, C., Najavits, L.M., Rohsenow, D.J. & Johnson, D.M. (2003). A cognitive-behavioral treatment for incarcerated women with substance abuse disorder and posttraumatic stress disorder: Findings from a pilot study. *Journal of Substance Abuse Treatment*, 25, 99-105.

## About the Authors

**Caitlin J. Taylor**, Ph.D., is an assistant professor in the Department of Sociology and Criminal Justice at La Salle University in Philadelphia. Her research investigates the collateral consequences of mass incarceration as well as issues faced by returning citizens. Recent projects have examined the relationship between family support and recidivism and the effects of a federal reentry court program on ex-offender reintegration. Her work has been published in *The Prison Journal*, *Criminal*

*Justice Policy Review, Probation Journal, and Violence & Victims.* E-mail:  
[taylorc@lasalle.edu](mailto:taylorc@lasalle.edu)

**Patricia Becker** is an undergraduate student at La Salle University in Philadelphia. She is currently applying to some of the top doctoral programs in criminal justice in the nation. Her research interests include ex-offender reentry, gender differences in offending and in the justice system, and sexual victimization.