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The Netherlands

Receiving visits in Dutch prisons: a study on the determinants and consequences of prison visitation

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Citation

Berghuis, M. L. (2022, June 23). *Receiving visits in Dutch prisons: a study on the determinants and consequences of prison visitation*. Retrieved from <https://hdl.handle.net/1887/3421468>

Version: Publisher's Version

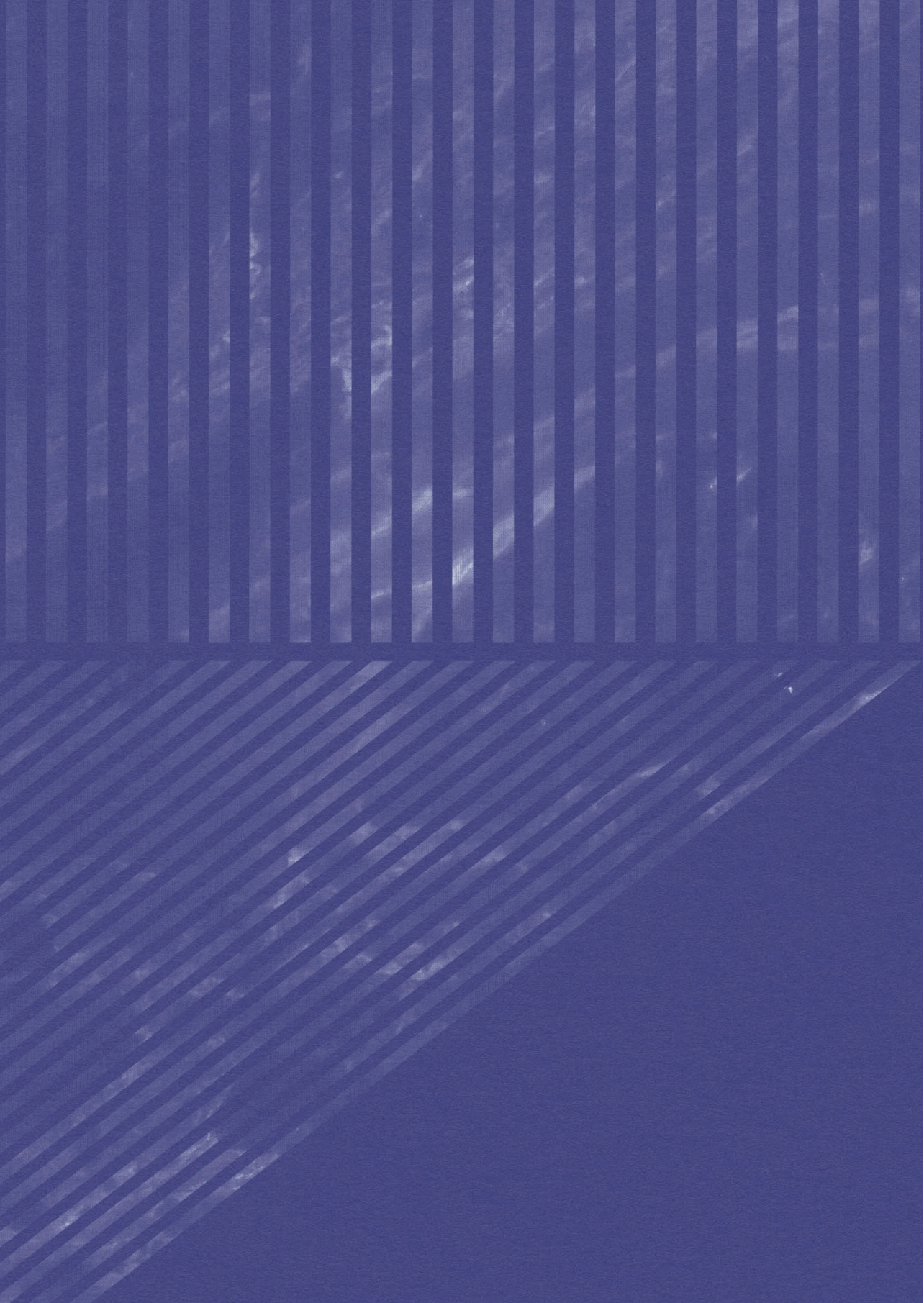
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PART I

THE CONTEXT OF PRISON VISITATION IN THE NETHERLANDS



2

Prison visits in the Netherlands: the current state of affairs

This chapter was published in Dutch as: Berghuis M.L., Palmen H., & Nieuwbeerta P. (2020), Bezoek in Nederlandse gevangenissen: De stand van zaken, *Proces, Tijdschrift voor Strafrechtspleging* 99(2): 110-132.
<https://doi.org/10.5553/PROCES/016500762020099002004>

Abstract

Prison visitation is important for protecting against social isolation during imprisonment. It is also essential for maintaining contacts that are important for life in prison and after release. It is therefore not surprising that both nationally and internationally important policy measures and scientific research have been undertaken on the topic. National research, however, has largely been conducted at a small-scale, leaving essential information regarding the prevalence and frequency of visitation unclear. Meanwhile, in the past ten years great changes have been made to visitation in Dutch prison policy and practice. Given these recent developments prior research is largely outdated and the results that are available have failed to reach practitioners, thus creating a knowledge gap between research, policy, and practice. This article aims to bridge this gap by summarizing findings from the Life in Custody study. This study includes a) a description of how visitation is organized legally, at the policy level and in practice, b) a thorough review of prior research on visitation and, c) an analysis of the most recent national data on the prevalence and frequency of visitation, while considering important individual and contextual differences.

Keywords: visitation, imprisonment, prison climate, prison experiences

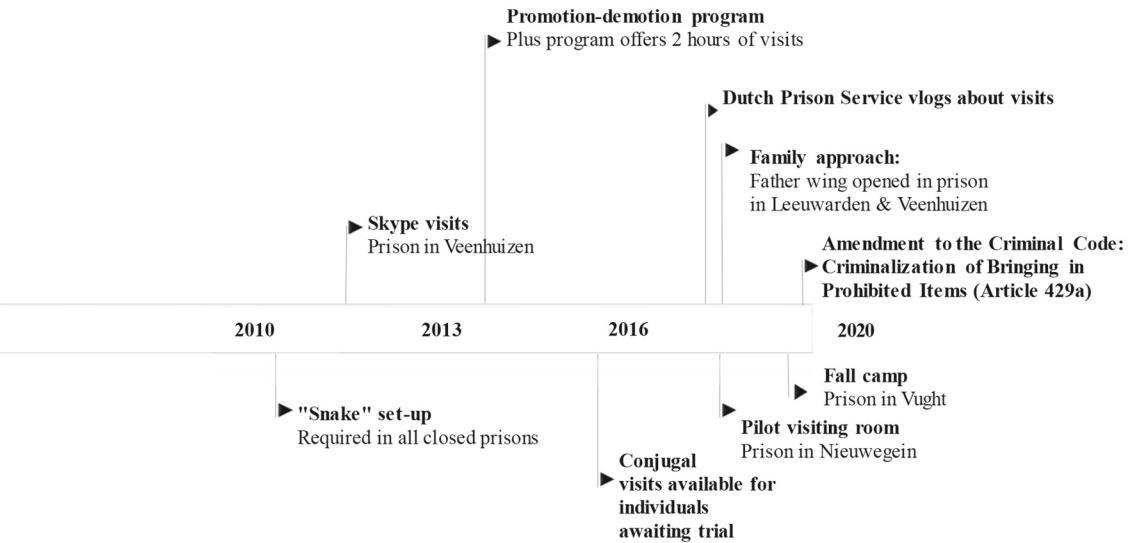
2.1 Introduction

Receiving visits in prison is important to ensure that individuals do not become socially isolated while incarcerated. Moreover, through receiving visits individuals in prisons can maintain and even restore important social relationships necessary for help after release. Currently, both scholars and practitioners recognize the importance of social ties for an individual's well-being during imprisonment and for a successful reentry into society. It is therefore not surprising that countries worldwide, including the Netherlands, have developed policies, practices, and conducted scientific research about prison visitation. Scientific knowledge about prison visits stems mainly from the United States (U.S.). A diverse number of articles have been published about visitation including overviews of visiting practices and policies in the U.S. (Boudin et al., 2014), conceptual frameworks for informing scholars how to best research prison visitation (Cochran & Mears, 2013), and a few systematic reviews about the effects of receiving visits in prison (De Claire & Dixon, 2017; Mitchell et al., 2016). These studies generally show that visits are important for prison life and that visits can have positive effects on life after prison, although not all visits have a positive influence on individuals (Casey-Acevedo et al., 2004; Siennick et al., 2013). Nonetheless, it remains unclear as to whether these results are generalizable to the Dutch prison context.

In the Netherlands, we have limited knowledge about how many, how often, and from whom individuals receive visits throughout their incarceration, how these visits are experienced, and whether receiving visits has a positive effect on the well-being and behavior of incarcerated individuals and their visitors. Prior Dutch studies on visitation have only partially answered these questions (e.g., Janssen, 2000; Moerings, 1978; Slotboom & Bijleveld, 2007). Considering the increased attention prison visits have received in both policy and practice in the past ten years (see Figure 2.1, which uses the Penitentiary Principles Act from 1998 as a starting point), the research that exists is largely outdated. Recent initiatives and pilots concerning visitation could have important implications on the receipt and experience of prison visits, but due to the lack of recent research the possible consequences of these changes in policy and practice remains unclear.

Figure 2.1 Developments in Prison Visitation





The goal of this chapter is therefore to provide an overview of the current state of affairs of prison visitation in the Netherlands. This overview is necessary to develop and implement efficient correctional policy concerning visits and to identify and support vulnerable groups who are less able to maintain connections to their social network. In this chapter, three central questions will be addressed:

- How is contact with family and friends via prison visits organized in law, policy, and practice?
- How many, how often, and from whom do individuals receive visits in prison? Are there differences between individuals and prisons?
- How do individuals experience visits and what are the consequences of receiving visits on their well-being and behavior?

In this chapter we specifically focus on standard visits (in Dutch: *het reguliere bezoek*), meaning visits from partner, parents, child(ren), family, and friends (and thus not those from other organizations, stakeholders, or legal professionals).

The current study is a part of the Life in Custody (LIC) study, a nationwide study on prison climate in the Netherlands. Since one of the factors contributing to prison climate is ‘contact with the outside world’ (Boone et al., 2016), a great deal of attention was paid to prison visits in this study. To provide an answer to the research questions, several methods were employed. To understand how prison visits are organized in law, policy, and practice explorative qualitative research was done. Legal documents, jurisprudence, websites of the Dutch Prison Service (*Dienst Justitiële Inrichtingen*), including webpages for each prison, were studied. Moreover, prison staff were interviewed, and structured observations¹ were done in all 28 operating prisons (between November 2016 and April 2017). Then, an extensive literature search was conducted to find all Dutch research on the topic. To ensure a comprehensive search, multiple databases were searched including: 1) electronic databases (such as WorldCat), 2) important Dutch scientific journals (such as *het Tijdschrift voor Criminologie*, *het Tijdschrift voor Veiligheid*, *Justiele Verkenning*, *PROCES en Sancties*), and 3) the Law Library at Leiden University. In addition, reference lists of relevant publications were screened and three Dutch researchers working on the topic were consulted. These efforts resulted in fourteen studies on prison visitation in the Netherlands (for an overview of these studies see Table 2.3). These studies are generally focused on the prevalence and determinants of visits,

1 During the observations in each prison a visit checklist was systematically completed. The checklist included the following topics: requesting visits, systems and forms available about visits, visiting schedules for each unit, set-up of the visiting room, and availability and frequency of special types of visits (e.g., conjugal visits and special parent-child visit days).

experiences with visits, and the consequences of receiving visits. Finally, survey and administrative data from 4,376 incarcerated individuals in the Netherlands were used. These individuals participated in the LIC study and filled in the Prison Climate Questionnaire (2017). This large group consists of males and females, individuals with short and long prison sentences in various regimes and prisons. These data are used to present up-to-date national figures on prison visits.

2.2 Visitation in Law, Policy, and Practice

Incarcerated individuals can see their family and friends during standard visiting hours, conjugal visits, and special family visits. Since the legal basis, administrative procedures, and practices differ for each type, we describe them separately below.

Standard Visits in Law and Policy

According to Article 38 section 1 of the Penitentiary Principles Act (PPA, in Dutch: *Penitentiaire beginselenwet*), individuals have the right to a minimum of one hour of visits per week from family or other persons (this refers to standard visits). This legal minimum applies to all prison regimes, including pretrial detainees. Since visits are a right, they cannot be revoked. However, visits can be limited in particular situations. For instance, the magistrate or the prosecutor can impose restrictions on contact with those outside prison walls. Prison governors can temporarily limit or postpone visits when individuals are placed in isolation due to a disciplinary infraction (Art. 24, section 2 PPA). Prison governors can also temporarily restrict access for certain visitors for a certain period (with a maximum of twelve months) for instance if they were caught smuggling in prohibited items (Art. 28, section 2 PPA). Moreover, for safety reasons prison governors can limit the form of contact, for example that visits must take place behind glass². It is also possible to deviate from this one hour and gain an extra hour of visits. In 2014 the promotion-demotion program was introduced through which individuals in the ‘plus program’ can earn an extra hour of visits each week (Van Gent, 2013). Although all incarcerated individuals have the right to one hour of visits each week, the practical implementation of these visits is determined by prison governors. Thus, how visitation operates differs across prisons, including the way visits are planned, when visits are possible, and how often visits can take place.

2 In maximum security prisons (in Dutch: *extra beveiligde inrichtingen*) visits normally take place behind glass (Van de Bunt et al., 2013).

Standard Visits in Practice

Next, we describe how visits operate in practice based on our observations and interviews with prison staff. The way visits operate in each prison is described in the so-called “house rules” (for which there is a national model). This is a booklet for (incoming) persons which describes all the rules and general regulations concerning visits. Firstly, the house rules describe how individuals can request a visit. In most Dutch prisons, the incarcerated individual is responsible for requesting their visits each week (except for four prisons which allow family and friends to make appointments). Upon arrival in prison, individuals must fill in a form (‘visitor form’) with the names and personal information of 10 – 25 potential visitors. Then, each week individuals fill in a separate form (‘visit request form’) to state which of these visitors is coming and when they are coming. In the four prisons where visitors can plan their visit, incarcerated persons are only required to fill in the visitor form and then the visitors call to make an appointment. For visitors, information is available about visiting hours on the prison website. However, the information is often unclear or outdated. For instance, the general visiting hours are listed (e.g., visits are available Monday through Friday from 9.00 – 16.00), but that can be misleading since individuals have a specific time slot for their specific prison unit. Some recent changes have been made in order to improve the quality of this information. In 2017 and 2018 new information was added to the Dutch Prison Services’ website, with special vlogs showing what visitors can expect when they come to visit. Special videos were also made for children.

In addition to explaining how visits can be requested, the house rules also dictate the times that standard visits are allowed. Since visits are a part of the daily programming, visiting hours are linked to the prison unit as opposed to the prison as a whole. In practice this means that each unit is assigned to specific visiting hour(s) on the same time and day every week. In a 2013 report by the Dutch Inspection Service of Justice & Security, it was concluded that incarcerated individuals were able to receive standard visits in a satisfactory manner (Bos, 2013). That said, some visiting hours were found to be impractical for visitors (for example because visiting hours were planned early in the morning during the week or visiting hours were during school hours). In 2014 the Council for Criminal Justice and Youth Protection decided that the right to receive visits must be effective, in other words, “those who wish to visit incarcerated individuals, should be able to do so” (translated from Dutch). According to the supervisory committee, it is reasonable to have visiting hours between 9:00 and 17:00. Based on our observations, we found that visiting hours varied between prisons, ranging generally from 8:00 until 17:00. Strikingly, most

prisons did not have visiting hours in the weekend, and only a few prisons allowed visits in the evening hours. We also noted that prisons differed in how flexible they were with visiting hours. Some prison governors choose, in light of budget cuts, to only allow visits for instance on Tuesdays and Thursdays to make more 'efficient' use of staff. In other prisons, however, there was more flexibility; individuals could choose from several different days or time slots to receive visits (still the maximum is set at two hours of visits per week, but visits can take place on different days each week). Around half of the prisons (15) allowed individuals to choose between different time slots during the week. This allows for more flexibility to plan in visits.

For individuals who are not from the Netherlands, or do not have family in the Netherlands, it can be difficult to receive visits. To address this, a prison in Veenhuizen began offering Skype visits in 2012 to allow for digital contact with family and friends. In exceptional circumstances (for instance when a partner was pregnant and close to their due date), Dutch nationals could also use Skype visits. In 2017, the prison in Veenhuizen was the only one that offered Skype visits as a regular part of their programming. While digital visits are also possible in other prisons³, it is up to the prison to decide if they want to make these available. The general policy is that Skype is an extra provision that should be used for a specific (group of) individuals and should be linked to a specific (reintegration) goal.

Standard visits take place in the visiting room where eight to 20 individuals can receive visitors. Individuals are allowed up to three visitors per visit, with young children (for example under two years old) often not counting towards this maximum. In most cases, prison staff decide where each incarcerated individual sits during the visit. Some staff members decide to place individuals quite close to each other, to keep a better eye on what is happening, even when the visiting room is not full. Other staff members allow individuals to sit further apart from each other, giving them a bit more privacy during the visit. Due to safety and security issues, all (closed) prisons have a visiting room with the so-called snake set-up (also referred to as the 'British hose', see Parliamentary Documents II, 2008/09, 31110, 8). The snake splits the visiting room in two using one consecutive table. The tables are closed at the bottom and have a low separating wall on the top. Visitors sit on the one side and incarcerated individuals on the other side (normally the inside of the snake). In this way there is a clear distinction between the incarcerated individual and the visitor(s). The snake was introduced for two main reasons: 1) to prevent

3 During the COVID-19 pandemic, digital visits were widely available since standard (in-person) visits were not possible. Prison officials seemed willing to keep these intact even after the pandemic, as an extra provision.

any risks of mistaken identity and 2) to prevent prohibited items (i.e., contraband) from getting into prison. While the snake may help lower these safety risks, it can be experienced as a hindrance by forming a physical barrier between individuals and their visitor(s). In light of this, a research pilot was conducted in the Nieuwegein prison to examine whether a different set-up may improve the visit experience. In contrast to the snake, one visiting room was furnished with a mix of high and low tables with different seating options (e.g., couches and bar stools). A play corner for children was also added and individuals and their visitors were offered coffee and tea during the visit. All these changes were made to try and create more natural contact between individuals and their visitors.

In the standard visiting rooms physical contact is limited to brief contact (i.e., a hug or kiss) at arrival and when saying goodbye. In some prisons young children are allowed to be passed over and held by the incarcerated person. The length of this contact depends on the staff member and the situation. Since visiting hours can be long for young children, most prisons offer some toys or coloring books. There are also restrooms available for visitors, although they are generally not allowed to be used during or after visiting hours. In the past, vending machines were often available in the visiting room so that individuals and their visitors could eat or drink something together, but during our observation period most vending machines had been taken away due to security issues.

In our conversations with prison staff, the prevention of contraband and other security risks (such as mistaken identity) appeared to be one of their greatest concerns. Many measures are taken before, during, and after visits to lower such security risks. For example:

- Entry controls: personal identification is checked and registered; visitors must go through a metal detector and bags are checked
- Clothing restrictions in the visiting room: both for visitors (for example, no jackets, bags, or hats) and incarcerated individuals (for example, no sweatpants, hats, jackets, scarves, shorts, watches, or jewelry)
- Drug dogs: these are randomly used in visitor waiting areas
- Surveillance: through security staff and cameras during visits
- Physical checks: after visits, incarcerated individuals can be patted down or (randomly) strip searched

Until recently, visitors who were caught smuggling in contrabands could be suspended from visiting for up to twelve months. In 2019, bringing prohibited items into prison, including seemingly benign items such as cell phones, became a criminal

act in the Netherlands (Amendment to the Criminal Code: Criminalization of bringing in prohibited items, Article 429a). Incarcerated individuals can also get punished for possession or use of contrabands (a common punishment is several days in own cell without television and programming).

Conjugal Visits

Next to standard visits, adults in Dutch prisons can also receive conjugal visits if they meet the following criteria, as described in Article 3.8.1. in the national model for penitentiary house rules: a) individuals must have a consecutive stay of at least six months in one or more normal security prison, b) the visit makes a reasonable contribution to maintaining or strengthening the relationship between the individual and visitor, c) the relationship is durable and strong, according to the prison governor and, d) the visit does not endanger the investigation or prosecution of the offenses for which the individual is suspected or convicted. These criteria went into effect as of December 1st, 2015, meaning that individuals in pretrial detention can also receive conjugal visits. Conjugal visits are not only meant for romantic relationships, but also for strengthening the relationship between parents and their child(ren). In such cases these visits are called ‘relationship promoting visits’ or ‘visits with limited supervision’.

Similar to standard visits, conjugal visits must also be requested. There is a separate form for conjugal visits that must be filled in by the incarcerated individuals and, in some cases, the visitor. The prison governor then decides based on the aforementioned criteria if the individual may receive conjugal visits and for how long. An examination of the jurisprudence concerning prison visits shows that most cases concern conjugal visits. Of the 51 cases listed on the website of the supervisory committee (*Commissie van Toezicht*) about prison visits, 27 concerned conjugal visits. Most of the cases are about denied requests due to not meeting all criteria (such as not having stayed long enough in a normal security prison or unable to provide enough proof that the relationship is durable). The fact that so many cases concern conjugal visits is likely because conjugal visits are not a right but a decision of the prison governor, for which they are given substantial discretionary power.

When approved, individuals can receive conjugal visits once a month. These visits are one hour long and substitute the standard visit in that week. Conjugal visits take place in a simple room with a couch, bed, shower, toilet, and table with two chairs. Most rooms have an austere appearance and no window(s). Some individuals have stated that they would rather not have conjugal visits due to the austerity of the rooms. These rooms are often close to, or even next to, consultation

rooms for lawyers and other professionals. While these rooms do offer more privacy than the standard visiting room, they are often small and noisy. So-called relationship promoting visits or visits with limited supervision take place either in the consultation rooms or in a special family room. In this way individuals and their families can talk to each other in a quiet space and are given more privacy. Some prisons (for example in Leeuwarden, Veenhuizen, and Zaanstad) even offer special family rooms which are meant to make people feel at home. These spaces provide a more natural setting so that imprisoned parents can easily play and interact with their child(ren).

Special Family Visits

Beyond national legislation concerning visits, European legislation has also led to more special types of visits for incarcerated parents and their children. Article 8 of the European Convention on Human Rights states that every person has the right to respect for one's private and family life. This is further emphasized in the European prison rules. In particular, rule 24.4 states the importance of being able to maintain family relationships while in prison. Additionally, the Council of Europe has given recommendations concerning parents in prison (Reef & Schuyt, 2018). To promote a healthy relationship between parent and child, special parent-child visit days were introduced in September 2008 in all Dutch prisons (van der Sande, 2008). Children between the age of six months to 12 years old can participate in parent-child visit days (although some prisons allow children up to 16 years old). These visits vary from being two hours long up to a half day. These visits typically take place on Wednesday afternoons or in the weekend so children who go to school can participate. The number of times these visits are offered differs across prisons, from four times a year to twelve times a year. Parent-child visit days take place in a child-friendly room; the prison gym is often used since there is enough space to be able to play games and do other activities. Most prisons organize these days with volunteers from two organizations: Exodus and Humanitas. These volunteers help during the visiting hour and arrange transport for children (and guardians) to get to the prison. Prison staff are responsible for surveillance and safety during the visits. In our interviews with prison staff, many staff members emphasized that these days are very popular among incarcerated parents and that many individuals use these opportunities to see their children.

Some recent initiatives have specifically targeted incarcerated fathers. Special father-child visits have been set up. During these visits children are brought by volunteers or another parent, but the visit is only for the father and child. In 2018 a

family-oriented project started in the prisons in Leeuwarden and Veenhuizen. This project aimed to help fathers fulfill their role as a parent and minimize the negative impact of parental incarceration for children, which may ultimately help them refrain from crime. Incarcerated fathers interested in this program can apply, and if they meet certain criteria, they can be placed on a ‘father’ unit. This unit runs a different daily program which provides fathers with more opportunities to be in contact with their child(ren). They can use the family-friendly visiting area where they can play with their child(ren) during visits. They also can Skype with their children from their cell to read to them or help them with homework. In 2019 another initiative started in Vught. Exodus (a volunteer organization) planned a four-day fall camp for 15 children and eight fathers in October.

2.3 How Many, How Often, and From Whom do Individuals Receive Visits in Prison?

The second part of this chapter provides figures on how many individuals receive visits during their incarceration, how often they receive visits, and from whom they receive visits. We begin by discussing prior research on these questions and then provide recent figures using data from the LIC study. Besides providing up-to-date information, this study seeks to extend and deepen our understanding of who gets visited in Dutch prisons.

Prior Dutch Research on the Prevalence of Prison Visits

Prior research on prison visits in the Netherlands has examined the prevalence of receiving visits for diverse groups of individuals. This body of work has found that 64% (Janssen, 2000) to 89% (Hickert et al., 2019) of adult males and females received visits in prison. The reported prevalence differed across visitor types. For example, Moerings (1978) reported that 78% of individuals received visits from their partners, while other studies reported lower prevalence (for example, 35% for adult males serving a short sentence, Janssen, 2000). Two studies among adult males showed that fewer, around 50%, individuals were visited by family. In terms of child visits, four studies reported that fewer incarcerated fathers received child visits in comparison to incarcerated mothers (Brouwers & Sampiemon, 1988; Janssen, 2000; Slotboom & Bijleveld, 2007; Wolleswinkel, 1997). These studies show that the reported prevalence differs greatly, depending on the research sample. Nevertheless, the results of these studies indicate that a substantial group of individuals do not receive visits in prison.

Researchers in the Netherlands have provided several arguments for why some individuals are visited and others are not. First, there may be practical barriers to visiting. Interview accounts revealed that visitors often had to travel far to get to the prison and had a hard time reaching prisons, especially with public transport (Braam et al., 2007; Janssen, 2000; Moerings, 1978; Slotboom et al, 2007). In a case study of ten prisons, it was found that visit days and times were hard for visitors to manage, for instance because visiting hours were very early in the morning or during school hours (Bos, 2013). Second, individual characteristics were also named as a reason for why some are visited, and others are not. Some individuals already had little or no contact with family and friends prior to incarceration (Hickert et al, 2019). A persons' criminal background (e.g., type of offense committed and incarceration history) and circumstances in prison (e.g., how long someone was incarcerated) also explained differences between individuals (Moerings, 1978; Janssen, 2000).

Although prior studies have laid an important foundation for our knowledge on the prevalence of visitation in Dutch prisons, still important questions remain unanswered. Since the available Dutch research is largely based on small groups of incarcerated individuals and/or specific populations (such as individuals with short prison sentences or incarcerated mothers), the question remains whether the reported prevalence is representative for the entire Dutch prison population. Moreover, through our examination of policy and practices, it became evident that visits are organized differently across prisons. Research across several prisons could help identify whether these differences impact the number of individuals receiving visits, yet most prior research has been conducted in one or a few prisons. Furthermore, we know little about the frequency of visits. While the prevalence gives an indication of whether individuals receive visits, it is also important to know how often individuals receive visits. This can have important implications for the impact of visits, as more frequent visits could be an indication of stronger social ties which is likely necessary for improved adjustment to imprisonment and a successful reentry. Lastly, it is important to examine whether the prevalence has changed using more recent numbers given the various initiatives in the last ten years.

Prevalence and Frequency of Visits per Visitor Type: Estimates from the LIC study

The LIC study aimed to extend our current knowledge about the prevalence of prison visits and deepen it by examining some of the aforementioned unanswered questions. To this end, data were collected about the prevalence and frequency of visitation from various visitor types (including partner, child(ren), family, and friends) in all operating prisons in the Netherlands (in 2017). Incarcerated individuals received

the Prison Climate Questionnaire (PCQ), in which questions were asked about visitation. Specifically, individuals were asked how often they saw their partner, child(ren), family, and friends in the past three months (or since the start of their incarceration if they were incarcerated for less than three months).

Descriptive statistics showed that 72% of incarcerated individuals received at least one visit in the past three months. The prevalence of each specific visitor type can be found in Table 2.1. From the individuals who reported having a partner, 71% received at least one visit from their partner. About 51% of incarcerated parents received visits from their child(ren). Just over half of incarcerated individuals received visits from their family (57%), and just under half (48%) received visits from friends.

Table 2.1 National Estimates of the Prevalence and Frequency of Visitation

Visits from	Prevalence of visits		Frequency of visits (number of visits per month)		
	N	%	N	M	SD
Partner	2,383	70.5	1,568	3.49	1.41
Child	2,455	51.4	1,106	2.81	1.69
Family	4,376	57.1	2,119	2.65	1.65
Friend	4,376	48.2	1,760	2.39	1.69

Note. Valid percentages are shown. Partner visits were only calculated for those individuals who reported having a partner. Likewise, child visits were only calculated for those individuals who reported having at least one child.

These national estimates demonstrate that a substantial number of individuals did not receive visits in prison ($N = 1,098$). Although these individuals did not receive visits, that does not necessarily mean that they are socially isolated since there are other ways to stay in contact with family and friends while incarcerated. From this group of individuals who did not receive visits, 80% did report having phone contact with family, friends, or partner, of which 34% said they had daily phone contact.

For individuals who did report receiving visits, the frequency of visits was calculated separately for each visitor type, defined as the average number of visits per month⁴. As shown in Table 2.1, incarcerated individuals were visited by partners most frequently (almost weekly, $M = 3.49$, $SD = 1.41$) and by friends least frequently (on average every other week, $M = 2.39$, $SD = 1.69$).

4 When individuals reported receiving weekly visits from family, this does not necessarily mean that only one person visited. It simply means that in the past three months a family member has visited on a weekly basis.

Next to standard visits, individuals can also receive conjugal and special family visits. To give an indication of the prevalence of these visits, administrative data on visits was used from eight Dutch prisons⁵ since these data are only adequately recorded in a few prisons. This data demonstrated that 24% of adult males who, based on their time spend in prison, were eligible for conjugal visits had at least one conjugal visit⁶. This percentage is higher among those individuals who reported having a partner (40%). The administrative data on special family days seems less reliable as these data show that only 2% of incarcerated fathers participated in these days. Perhaps the current system used for tracking visits is insufficiently used to record these special types of visits.

Differences Between Incarcerated Individuals and Prisons

Since the corrections system comprises of different groups of individuals, and the prevalence of visits varied substantially in prior research, we compared the prevalence and frequency of visits for individuals with different demographic (e.g., age and gender) and detention characteristics (e.g., amount of time served). In addition, we compared individuals in different regimes, programs, and prisons. To test whether these differences are statistically significant, chi-square tests were used for the likelihood of receiving a visit and independent t-tests were used for the frequency of visits.

Demographic Characteristics

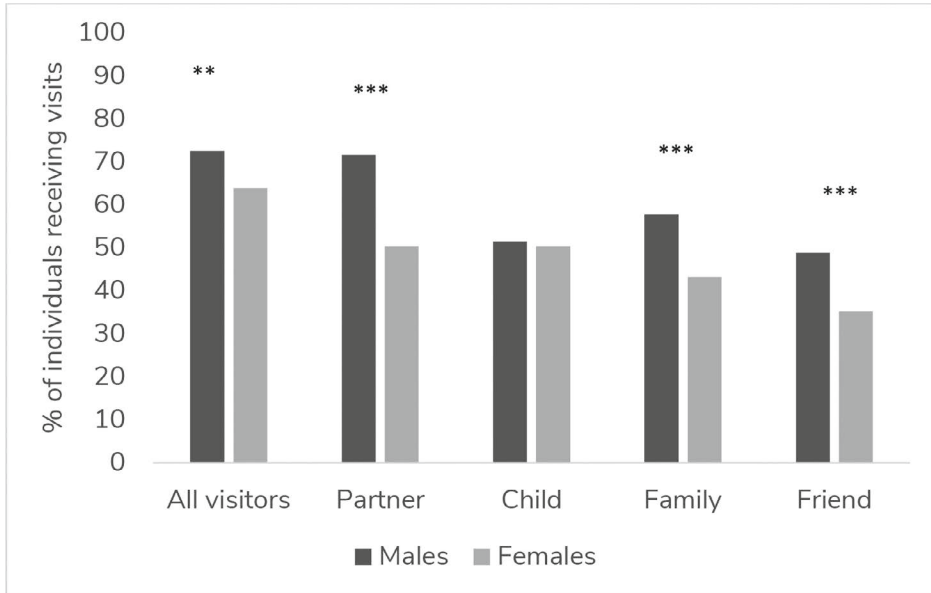
The data from the LIC study shows that the prevalence of visitation is relatively higher among younger individuals (defined as younger than 30) when compared to older individuals (i.e., older than 30). Younger individuals were also visited more often. Perhaps younger individuals are visited more often because they have a larger social network. The prevalence and frequency of visits was also higher among individuals who were born in the Netherlands. It is possible that foreign nationals have family and friends living abroad, which makes it more difficult to receive in-person visits. Finally, Figure 2.2 shows that the prevalence of visits is higher among adult males than their female counterparts (except for child visits). The largest difference between males and females can be seen by partner visits; 72% of incarcerated males who have a

5 These eight prisons are geographically spread across the Netherlands and house adult males in various regimes.

6 This estimate refers to the number of individuals who *could* have requested a conjugal visit and then actually received a conjugal visit. Thus, these estimates do not reflect the percentage of conjugal visits that are granted (I suspect that this number is much higher, but these data were not available).

partner received a partner visit, whereas only half of incarcerated females who have a partner received a visit. No significant differences were found between males and females concerning how often they received visits.

Figure 2.2 How Many Incarcerated Males and Females Receive Visits in Prison?



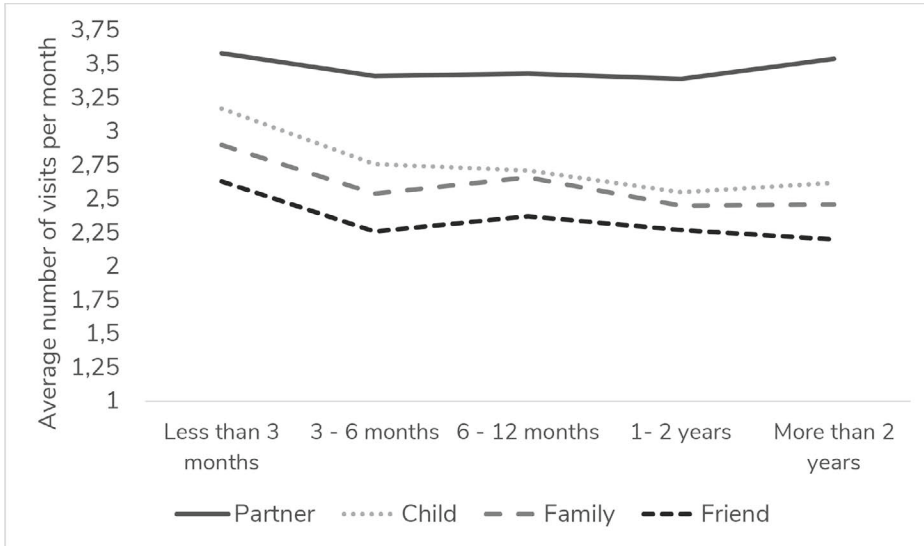
Note. ** $p < .01$; *** $p < .001$

Detention Characteristics

The prevalence and frequency of visits could also differ depending on the amount of time spent in prison. Our results demonstrate that around 50% of individuals who were incarcerated for less than three months (referred to as short sentences) received visits, whereas nearly 80% of individuals who were incarcerated for six months or longer received visits. It is possible that individuals who serve short sentences choose to not receive any visits since they are only in prison for a short period of time. In terms of frequency, individuals who serve short sentences are visited more often than individuals who serve longer sentences. Perhaps it is more feasible for family and friends to visit often when someone is incarcerated for a short period of time. As shown in Figure 2.3, the average number of visits per month is slightly lower for individuals who are in prison for longer. Yet, for some visitor types the frequency does not seem to differ depending on time served in prison.

Individuals still receive frequent visits from a partner, for instance, even when they are incarcerated for a long time.

Figure 2.3 Frequency of Visits Based on Time Served



We also examined differences in visitation prevalence and frequency based on whether an individual was incarcerated for the first time or had already been incarcerated several times. Our findings demonstrate small differences based on incarceration history; 78% of individuals who were incarcerated for the first time were visited, whereas 75% of individuals who were incarcerated for the second time were visited. Only 61% of individuals who were incarcerated more than five times received visits in past three months. Individuals who experienced multiple incarcerations were not visited less often by partner, child, and family, but they did receive fewer visits from friends. Perhaps friendship ties are less strong or of a different quality than family ties, such that the relationship is more likely to dissolve when someone is physically absent due to imprisonment.

Regime & Programs

Based on our national data, the number of individuals who receive visits is higher in regular prison regimes (80%) than pretrial detention (71%), which held true for all visitor types (partner, child, family, and friends). One possible explanation is that individuals in regular prison regimes can have an extra hour of visits through the plus program. For other regimes (including extra care, police arrestees, and persistent

offender regimes), the prevalence of visits was 68% in extra care regimes and 67% in persistent offender regimes. Only 52% of police arrestees received visits, perhaps because they are typically incarcerated for very short periods of time (about half of police arrestees are in prison for less than 60 days, see de Looft et al., 2018). Minimal differences were found for the frequency of visits between the different regimes.

Through the promotion-demotion program, visits are used as a behavioral incentive. If individuals met certain requirements, they can receive an extra hour of visits. Using data from the LIC study we compared how many individuals in the basic program versus the plus program received visits and how often they were visited. As shown in Table 2.2, the prevalence of visitation in general, and across all visitor types is relatively higher among individuals in the plus program. Contrary to expectation, the reported frequency of visits does not differ between individuals in the basic and plus program. This may be because, even if individuals can receive a second hour of visits, it is not necessarily feasible for visitors to come twice a week. It is also possible that individuals have longer visits but not necessarily more visits (by having two consecutive hours of visits, rather than having two separate visits); although we were unable to make this distinction in our survey data. Taken together, the results show that granting individuals an extra hour of visits does relate to more individuals being visited, but not necessarily more frequent visits.

Table 2.2 Prevalence and Frequency of Visitation by Program

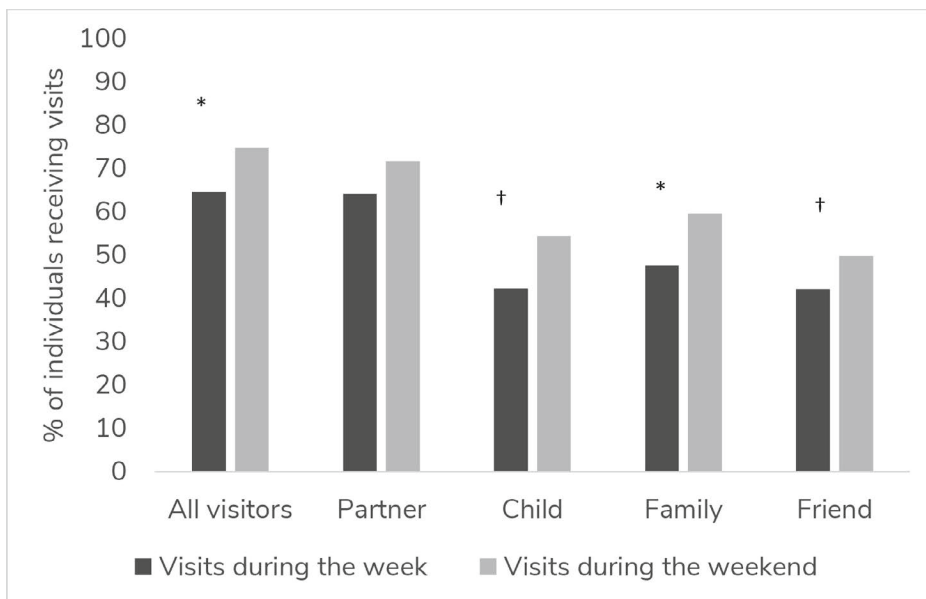
	Basic program	Plus program	Sig.
	N = 2,939	N = 1,381	
Prevalence	%	%	
Visits from			
Anyone	66.9	83.4	***
Partner	65.7	80.4	***
Child	44.5	63.9	***
Family	51.4	69.3	***
Friend	42.8	59.4	***
Frequency	N = 1,763	N = 1,079	
	M (SD)	M (SD)	
Partner	3.45 (1.16)	3.57 (1.73)	
Child	2.78 (1.48)	2.84 (1.91)	
Family	2.67 (1.49)	2.62 (1.86)	
Friend	2.40 (1.50)	2.38 (1.94)	

Note. *** $p < .001$

Prisons

When we compare the number of individuals who receive visits across prisons, we find that the prevalence of visitation per prison varies from 45% to 87%. This is also true for the different types of visitors, especially child visits. In a few prisons only 20-30% of incarcerated parents received a visit from their child(ren), while in other prisons this number was much higher (around 70%). Also, the number of individuals who receive visits is substantially higher in prisons that offer weekend visits when compared to prisons that only have visiting hours during the week (see Figure 2.4). As can be seen, these differences were significant for child, family, and friend visits. Only the prevalence of partner visits did not seem to be related to whether weekend visits were available.

Figure 2.4 Prevalence of Visitation for Prisons with Visiting Hours During the Week (n = 8) Versus in the Weekend (n = 11)



Note. This information was only available for 19 of the 28 prisons.
 †p < .10; *p < .05

Differences between prisons were minimal when it comes to how often individuals were visited by partner or child(ren). However, in a few prisons incarcerated individuals were visited more often by family and friends. For example, in one prison, individuals received on average 2.13 family visits per month, whereas in another prison individuals received on average 3.19 family visits per month. These

differences may be due to the flexibility in visitation regulations concerning visiting hours. For example, individuals can choose from different time slots. That said, bivariate analyses indicate that visitation regulations are mainly related to a higher prevalence of visits, but not necessarily to higher frequencies. Perhaps more consequential for frequency is the location of the prison. The prisons with the lowest levels of frequency were outside of the ‘Randstad’, a conurbation in the Netherlands, consisting of the four largest cities (Amsterdam, the Hague, Rotterdam, and Utrecht) and their surrounding areas. Prisons within or close to the Randstad had much higher average frequencies across all visitor types. While robust research is needed to understand whether and how travelling distance and accessibility impact the receipt of visits, these findings at least suggest that practical barriers may be important for how often individuals receive visits (see also Clark & Duwe, 2017; Cochran et al., 2016).

2.4 How do Individuals Experience Prison Visits and What Consequences do Visits Have on Individuals’ Well-being and Behavior?

As illustrated in the previous section, receiving visits in prison is not self-evident. Even when individuals receive visits, their experiences can be very diverse which may have implications for visits’ effects. Several criminological theories suggest that visitation experiences are important for understanding how and why visits affect behavior in prison (such as well-being and misconduct) and after release (such as recidivism and social support during the reentry process). Few studies exist that have explored visitation experiences in Dutch prisons and investigated the possible consequences of these visits (see Table 2.3 for an overview). The results of these studies will be described below.

Visitation Experiences

Research based on interview accounts with incarcerated individuals indicate that, while incarcerated individuals enjoy receiving visits (Beyens et al., 2013; Janssen, 2000), practical challenges hinder these visits. In a case study of ten prisons, it was found that visiting days and times did not match up with visitors’ schedules. For example, some visiting hours were inconvenient for visitors as they were very early or during school hours (Bos, 2013). Other studies report that visitors often have to travel far to get to the prison, and that the prisons are difficult to reach with public transport (Braam et al., 2007; Janssen, 2000; Moerings, 1978; Slotboom & Bijleveld,

2007). Incarcerated individuals also indicated that visiting hours were limited and often cut short as they were commonly called too late to go to the visiting room (Moerings et al., 2008).

Table 2.3 Overview of Prior Dutch Research on Prison Visitation

Author, year	N	Sample	Data
Moerings, 1978	200	Incarcerated males	Interviews during and after incarceration
Brouwers & Sampiemon, 1988	107	Incarcerated females	Interviews
Wolleswinkel, 1997	-	Incarcerated mothers	Legal and literature study
Holwerda, 1997	9	Incarcerated fathers	Interviews & survey
Janssen, 2000	100	Males with short prison sentences	Interviews during and after incarceration
Braam et al., 2007	24	Incarcerated mothers	Case study, interviews & expert meeting
Slotboom & Bijleveld, 2007	109	Incarcerated females in Ter Peel & Nieuwersluis prisons	Survey & interviews
Moerings et al., 2008	297	Incarcerated males and females	Content analysis of letters
Slotboom et al., 2008; 2009	251	Incarcerated females	Survey
Beyens & Boone, 2013	36	Belgian adults incarcerated in Tilburg prison	Survey, observations & interviews
Bos, 2013	10	Prisons	Case study, interviews & observations
Schuhmann et al., 2018	21	Incarcerated males and females	Interviews
Hickert et al., 2019	497	Adult males in pretrial detention	Interviews during and after incarceration

Note. The N for Slotboom & Bijleveld's (2007) study is reported for the survey. From the 109 women who participated in the survey, 28 were interviewed.

Next to these practical barriers, incarcerated individuals also experience barriers concerning physical contact and privacy during visits. One study detailed how women struggled with having little to no physical contact with their visitors (Slotboom et al., 2009). They would therefore prefer to have more opportunities for private visits. Incarcerated males also reported that there was little privacy during visits. Consequently, they avoided discussing certain topics with their visitors (Moerings, 1978; Janssen, 2000). In one study it was even found that prison officers listened in on conversations and sometimes even intervened during visits (Braam et al., 2007).

A few studies examined how visits from specific types of visitors were experienced. A recent article described experiences with volunteer visits in six Dutch

prisons (Schuhmann et al., 2018). This study showed that incarcerated individuals value these visits as they could have intimate conversations from which they drew hope, strength, and self-respect. Two other studies investigated experiences with child visits. Incarcerated mothers in four prisons described the visiting rooms as not child-friendly (Braam et al., 2007). One project which created a child-friendly visiting area for incarcerated males seemed to improve this experience as both fathers and children were positive about the visits (Holwerda, 1997).

In sum, prior studies on prison visitation in the Netherlands show that both incarcerated individuals and visitors find that practical barriers and lack of privacy hamper the visitation experience. Similar themes can be found in the international literature about visitation experiences (e.g., Mikytuck & Woolard, 2019; Turanovic & Tasca, 2019). Based on prior studies, however, it is difficult to conclude how generalizable these findings are to the entire Dutch prison population, and whether they are still relevant after several recent initiatives and projects have attempted to improve visitation experiences.

Consequences of Prison Visits

Next to the prevalence, frequency, and experiences of visitation Dutch research has also investigated whether receiving visits has positive or negative consequences on individuals' behavior and well-being. One study found that incarcerated females reported fewer depressive symptoms when family members visited frequently (Slotboom et al., 2009). Moreover, incarcerated mothers showed improvements in psychological well-being when they had more contact with their children (Slotboom et al., 2008). An evaluation of a visitation pilot that aimed to improve the father-child relationship showed that participating fathers had better relationships with their children than fathers who did not participate in the pilot (Holwerda, 1997).

Two prior studies tested the effects of receiving visits on life after release by using longitudinal interview data. Moerings (1978) found that incarcerated males who did not receive visits in prison were more likely to have lost relationships, live alone, and have less contact with family after release. A more recent study by Hickert et al. (2019) found that males in pretrial detention who had received visits from partner, parents, family, or friends during incarceration experienced higher levels of emotional support after release. Receiving visits from partners was also related to living with a partner after release. These results held even after controlling for measures of social support prior to incarceration. This suggests that social contact during prison via visits, and not purely the maintenance of already existing ties, has an impact on social support after release.

2.5 Conclusions and Implications for Policy and Research

In this chapter, we gathered information from legislation, policy initiatives, practice, and scientific research to create a current overview of the state of affairs of prison visitation in the Netherlands. In the past ten years an increasing number of developments and initiatives concerning prison visits have altered Dutch law, policy, and correctional practice. Correctional administrators increasingly seek to find a balance between ensuring safety of incarcerated individuals and staff in prison, while also trying to encourage contact with the outside world. Since 2008, visitation possibilities have been extended (even though the possibilities remain limited). Incarcerated parents have more opportunities to see their children, individuals in the plus program can receive an extra hour of visits, and conjugal visits are also possible for individuals in pretrial detention. Also, more attention has been given to visitors, especially children, as well as incarcerated individuals' experiences during visits. At the same time, several steps have been taken to increase security measures, including the introduction of the 'snake' and the criminalization of bringing prohibited items into prison.

Considering these steps, it is surprising that this important theme of finding a balance between ensuring safety while also encouraging contact with the outside world has received little attention in the scientific literature. Future research should therefore consider whether forms of visits and specific policies increase or decrease contraband infractions and general feelings of safety.

Also, in light of the Dutch Prison Service's goal to help build and strengthen social relationships for a successful reentry, the emphasis on parent-child relationship in policy directives is noteworthy. Although the importance of these relationships is evident, and may indirectly contribute to reintegration, it is also important to encourage other relationships. For a successful reintegration, it seems important to encourage visits from those relationships that help provide emotional support, but also instrumental support (such as finding housing and employment). Currently, we do not know enough about the role of partners and family members in the reintegration process.

Our second research question focused on the prevalence and frequency of visits for various groups of individuals. Dutch research consistently demonstrates that there is a group of individuals that does not receive any visits during their incarceration, although estimates of the size of the group varies. The most recent numbers suggest that around 30% of the prison population does not receive visits.

Several vulnerable groups can be identified: 1) individuals who do not receive visits and do not have contact with the outside world in other ways, 2) older individuals, 3) foreign-born individuals, 4) incarcerated females, and 5) individuals with an extensive incarceration history. In correctional practice, some activities are done to stimulate contact with the outside world (for instance through the Detention & Reintegration plan, volunteer visits, and conversations with the mentor). These activities should be actively targeted to the aforementioned vulnerable groups.

This study also found that the number of individuals receiving visits differed across prisons. We found that offering weekend visits seemed to increase the prevalence of visits, likely because they allow visits to be flexible. When it comes to how often individuals are visited, this study showed that individuals in prisons outside the Randstad were visited less often than individuals in prisons within the Randstad. For prisons outside the Randstad, it may be beneficial to consider how to increase accessibility for visitors. That said, this study found that different policies (such as weekend visits and offering an extra hour of visits), did not necessarily increase how often individuals received visits. These policies were mainly related to higher visit prevalence (i.e., that more individuals were visited). Future research should, therefore, investigate whether and how access to prisons impacts individuals' access to social ties. Such studies could provide important insight into policies concerning placing individuals in prisons in their respective regions.

The third research question focused on visitation experiences and visits' effects. Prior research among individuals incarcerated in the Netherlands showed that most individuals like to receive visits, but the lack of privacy and physical contact during visits adversely impacts their visitation experience. Receiving visits does seem to be related to improvements in well-being during imprisonment and has positive effects after release, but this has received little attention in the literature. More research is needed to establish how visits relate to incarcerated individuals' well-being and behavior both during and after imprisonment. International research emphasizes that visitation is a heterogeneous experience and can have both beneficial and adverse effects on incarcerated individuals and their reintegration process.

Several important questions thus remain unanswered in both national and international literature on visitation. As part of the LIC study, a recent project has begun to examine prison visitation from different perspectives and in all its variety. The Dutch Prison Visitation Study (DPVS) focuses on several aspects of visits, including the determinants and consequences of visitation, as well as the heterogeneity of visitation experiences in relation to preparing for release and behavior during and after imprisonment. For the latter, the PCQ was distributed to

all incarcerated adults in 2019. Also, surveys were given to visitors and professionals. By including more actors we can gain even more insight into the importance of visits for the lives of incarcerated individuals during imprisonment and in preparation for release (for example, concerning access to healthcare, having a valid ID, tackling financial problems, acquiring housing and employment, and establishing and maintaining supportive relationships). Through the unique collaboration between the Dutch Prison Service and prisons, the DPVS intends to bridge the gap between visitation research and practice.

