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

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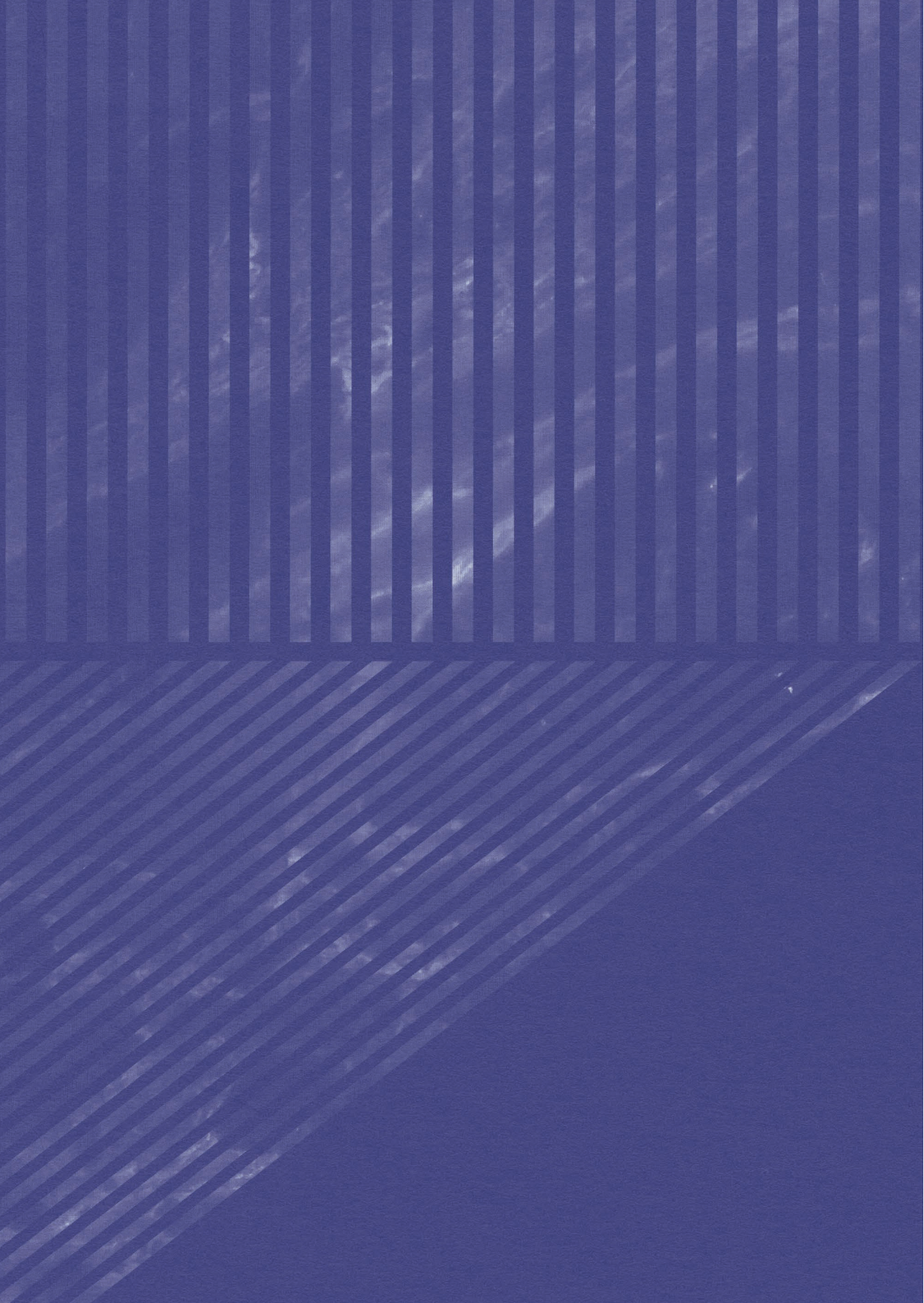
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# PART II

## **THE DETERMINANTS OF PRISON VISITATION**



# 3

## **The prevalence and determinants of visits from partner, child(ren), family, and friends in Dutch prisons: the role of social networks and criminal history**

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## **Abstract**

Scholarship has shown that visitation is an especially important experience for incarcerated individuals and can have a beneficial impact on life after release. Receiving visits in prison, however, is not self-evident. This study uses data from a nationally representative sample of adults incarcerated in the Netherlands ( $N = 4,376$ ) to estimate the prevalence of, and identify determinants for, visits from partner, child(ren), family, and friends. Consistent with expectations from social support theory, results indicate that having a strong social network is associated with visitation. Individuals who are older, have a non-Western background, and have short prison stays are less likely to be visited. Unexpectedly, the type of offense and incarceration history were less predictive of prison visits, although results differed across visitor types. Implications of these findings for prison administrators and research are discussed.

**Keywords:** visitation, prison experiences, social ties

### 3.1 Introduction

Individuals incarcerated in the Netherlands have the right to receive one-hour visits per week. This right is important as visits are one of the only ways individuals can have contact with family and friends while incarcerated and maintain, restore, or even improve their relationships. These relationships are important for individuals' well-being in prison and for life after release. Scholarship has shown that individuals who receive visits in prison are more likely to find employment or housing after release (Brunton-Smith & McCarthy, 2017), experience emotional support in the turbulent times after release (Hickert et al., 2019), and are less likely to return to prison (Mitchell et al., 2016) in comparison to individuals who do not receive visits while incarcerated. Moreover, individuals who receive visits are also less likely to be socially isolated after release (Cochran & Mears, 2013; Moerings, 1978). In sum, maintaining existing relationships through visits during incarceration seems important for a successful reintegration.

Despite these potential benefits, receiving visits in prison is not self-evident. Prior research in Dutch prisons show that a substantial number of incarcerated individuals – around 36% (Janssen, 2000) – do not receive visits. Similar numbers have been found in other countries (Cochran et al., 2017; Tewksbury & Connor, 2012), however there are differences from whom individuals were likely to receive visits. For example, scholars have found that half of adult males in pretrial detention in the Netherlands do not receive visits from their family (Hickert et al., 2019; Janssen, 2000) and 35% of individuals serving short sentences do not receive visits from their partner in prison (Janssen, 2000). Also, more than half of incarcerated parents do not receive visits from their children while incarcerated (Brouwers & Sampiemon, 1988; Janssen, 2000). Thus, not every individual in prison receives visits and the prevalence of visits differs across relationships.

Given the importance of receiving visits in prison for life during incarceration and after release, it is critical to identify who receives visits in prison and to understand which factors contribute to receiving visits. Knowledge about these factors can help correctional officials facilitate visits, which could ultimately increase the prevalence of visits in prisons. At the same time research examining who gets visited can establish differences between individuals and identify vulnerable groups. The goal of this study therefore is to understand the determinants of visitation in Dutch prisons.

Prior empirical studies have provided important insights into which factors are associated with prison visits. Well-known studies in the Netherlands on this topic

were conducted in the 1970s and generally examined how criminal history (such as index offense and incarceration history) can explain variations in visits. International research, which heavily relies on prison administrative data, generally has focused on practical barriers to visits (such as how travelling distance impacts receiving visits, see Clark & Duwe, 2017, Sturges & Al-Khattar, 2009) and how individual (demographic) characteristics can explain why some individuals do not receive visits (Cochran et al., 2017; Tewksbury & Connor, 2012).

Recently, scholars have focused on improving our understanding of who gets visited in prison. For example, individual differences in pre-incarceration social capital likely influences who gets visited (Atkin-Plunk & Armstrong, 2018 Hickert et al., 2019). Studies suggest that individuals with a smaller social network are less likely to receive visits than those who have a larger social network (Cochran 2017, Stacer, 2012, Tewksbury 2012). Also, individuals with a weak social network (for instance those who did not have frequent contact with family or friends prior to incarceration) probably are less likely to receive visits than individuals who have strong relationships. These important differences in social support prior to incarceration have yet to be explored in large-scale studies concerning the receipt of visits (see Chapter 2).

In recent years there has been a considerable number of developments in Dutch prison policies and practice concerning visitation. The importance of prison visits, and by extension the maintenance of social networks, has been increasingly recognized as evidenced by the increase in initiatives to stimulate and encourage prison visits (for example the family approach project). Existing research on prison visitation in the Netherlands dates from well before these developments. Moreover, these studies have generally been done on a small scale, are mainly descriptive, and have focused on specific populations, such as males serving short-term sentences (Janssen, 2000), incarcerated mothers (Wolleswinkel, 1997) or males in pretrial detention (Hickert et al., 2019). Against this backdrop, the goal of this study is twofold: 1) to provide up-to-date figures on how many individuals receive visits in Dutch prisons and from whom they receive visits, 2) to examine how social network characteristics and criminal history are associated with receiving visits in prison.

### **Who Gets Visited in Prison: Theory & Prior Research**

The theoretical basis for this study can be found in social support (Lin, 1986 & Cullen, 1994) and labeling theory (Becker, 1963; Goffman, 1963). According to social support theory, some individuals are more likely to receive visits since they have a stronger social network. Developing and maintaining relationships in prison is

difficult. Practically it can be quite challenging for visitors to come to visit as they often have to travel far to get to the prison, take time off work, and endure financial costs. Despite these challenges, some family and friends do visit. It can be assumed that those who are close to the incarcerated individual (i.e., had a lot of contact prior to incarceration) are most likely to respond to their requests for help and support them, even if it is costly or requires effort (Vaux, 1998).

Recent research indeed shows that individuals who had strong relationships prior to incarceration were also more likely to receive visits in prison (Atkin-Plunk & Armstrong, 2018; Hickert et al., 2019). American research, however, does suggest that this mainly applies to familial relationships, especially partners (Arditti, 2003; La Vigne et al., 2016). These are important relationships, as individuals often rely on spouses or family members after release (Brunton-Smith & McCarthy, 2017). It is therefore important to consider an individuals' social network, especially their family situation, when studying the receipt of visits. In sum, existing social relationships - and then primarily the strength of relationships prior to incarceration - are important predictors of whether individuals receive visits in prison.

Research on prison visits in the Netherlands has generally relied on notions from the labeling theory to explain differences in visitation likelihoods. Arguments stemming from this theory suggest that some individuals may not receive visits due to the stigmatizing effect of their criminal history. While all incarcerated individuals can experience stigmatization, some individuals face additional discrimination or stigmatization from their social contacts due to the criminal offense(s) they have committed (Goffman, 1963), and consequently, may receive fewer visits in prison. Incarceration history (i.e., how often someone has been imprisoned) and the current situation (i.e., how long someone must serve time in prison and for what kind of offense) are also expected to play a role in receiving visits in prison.

For example, prior work has demonstrated that sex offenders are visited less often than other offenders (Cochran et al., 2015). Scholars have indicated that perpetrators of certain crimes, such as sex offenses, are often seen as monstrous or dangerous (Tewksbury, 2014) and that the stigma surrounding these offenses are stronger in comparison to other offenses. Moerings (1978) proposed in his doctoral research that some social ties can even be entirely severed as a result of the committed crime. His research also shows that people react differently when someone is incarcerated for the first time versus having been incarcerated multiple times. People are more likely to show empathy or offer support when someone is incarcerated for the first time (Moerings, 1978). Moreover, the length of the imprisonment can also impact the maintenance of social ties. Since long sentences

are often imposed for serious offenses, people may find a long prison sentence to be more stigmatizing (Moerings, 1978). Therefore, individuals who serve long prison sentences may be less likely to receive visits, but empirical evidence is limited. While some studies find that a long prison sentence is associated with less visits (e.g., Cochran et al., 2015), other studies find that longer prison spells are related to more visits (e.g., Cochran et al., 2017).

International research generally shows that individuals who have committed serious crimes and have an extensive criminal history are less likely to receive visits in prison (see Cochran et al., 2017; Stacer, 2012; Tewksbury & Connor, 2012). However, prior research has underscored the importance of considering who is coming to visit. For example, Connor and Tewksbury (2015) found that, as anticipated, sex offenders received fewer visits from friends, but they received the same number of visits from family members compared to other offenders. It can be assumed that shallow or superficial relationships, characterized by sporadic contact (for example friends), are more likely to be affected by stigma than those who are close to the incarcerated individual (such as a partner or mother) (Moerings, 1978). This implies that stigmatizing characteristics may work differently across relationships.

In sum, social support theory proposes that characteristics of the social network (e.g., the amount of contact and family situation) are important determinants of prison visitation, while labeling theory suggests that criminal history (e.g., offense type, incarceration history, and time served) is most important for prison visitation.

### **The Current Study**

The current study aims to extend prior research on prison visitation in the Netherlands by providing an updated account of the prevalence and determinants of prison visits. This study uses national survey data from the Life in Custody (LIC) study (Palmen et al., 2019; Van Ginneken et al., 2018) to provide prevalence numbers for the entire Dutch prison population, including males and females, individuals incarcerated in different regimes, and serving various amounts of time in prison. Following recent international research, we also differentiated between different types of visitors. Using multilevel logistic regression analyses, this study answers the following research questions:

1. How many individuals receive visits in the Netherlands and from whom?
2. To what extent are social network characteristics and criminal history associated with the likelihood of receiving visits in prison?
3. To what extent do these factors differentially relate to visits from partner, child(ren), family and friends?

Since these questions will be answered using data from the Netherlands, we first provide a short description of the Dutch incarceration and visitation context before preceding to the methods and results.

### **The Dutch Incarceration and Visitation Context**

Every year, 33,000 adults enter a Dutch prison (De Looff et al., 2018). In comparison to other countries, individuals are incarcerated for a relatively short time: approximately 60% of individuals are incarcerated for less than three months, and 70% is released within six months. Dutch prisons run different regimes on separate prison units. Regimes include pretrial detention, police arrestees, and regular prison regimes for convicted males and females housed in separate facilities. There are also separate regimes for individuals who are deemed vulnerable due to their suspected crime or psychological health (so-called 'extra care' units) and persistent offenders. Finally, Dutch prisons also have open regimes, which offer more freedom by allowing individuals to work outside of the prison during the day (and hence are only incarcerated at night). The most important difference between regimes is the daily programming that is offered.

According to Article 38, section 1 from the Principles Penitentiary Act incarcerated adults have the right to at least one hour of standard visits per week (meaning visits from family members or friends). With the exception of open regimes, this legal minimum requirement applies to all regimes and prisons. Individuals in open regimes can see their family and friends during their weekend furlough, and consequently, visits are not a part of the programming. Although individuals in other regimes can have furlough, the possibilities are very limited (for example, in closed facilities this is only allowed up to six times a year and in half open regimes once a month). Thus, in all other regimes standard visits are the only way to physically see family and friends more than once a month, and thus, constitute an important part of prison programming. Since the introduction of the promotion-demotion program in 2014, incarcerated individuals can earn an extra hour of standard visits per week (maximally two hours, Van Gent, 2013). This privilege is only available for convicted individuals in regular prison regimes (including extra care units). Individuals in pretrial detention, police arrestees, and persistent offenders are not included in this program, and therefore, cannot earn an extra hour of visits. The Inspectorate of the Ministry of Justice and Security concluded in 2013 that incarcerated adults in the Netherlands were provided satisfactory opportunities to receive visits in prison (Bos, 2013).

Besides standard visits, individuals can also receive conjugal visits in Dutch prisons. Individuals must meet several requirements and, if approved, they can

receive conjugal visits once per month. There are also extra visit opportunities for family relationships. Special parent-child visits are planned from four to twelve times a year. For individuals who are not from the Netherlands, it can be hard to receive visits when their families live abroad. For these individuals, Skype visits are available for specific individuals and only for a specific reintegration goal<sup>1</sup>. Beyond visits, incarcerated individuals can also call with family and friends. Individuals must pay for these phone calls themselves, which can be relatively expensive. Individuals can also write and receive letters though these can be checked by prison staff. Prior Dutch research shows that many individuals choose to receive visits to stay in contact with family and friends, even when they are incarcerated for short periods of time (Janssen, 2000).

Since visits are a part of the daily programming, visiting times are arranged per prison unit. In practice, this means that each prison unit has specific time slots to allow for visits. Individuals receive standard visits in the visiting room. Rooms typically hold eight to 20 individuals and their visitors. Individuals are allowed up to three visitors per visit (young children under the age of two are generally not counted towards this maximum). Visitors are not required to go through background screening, but visitors must be registered<sup>2</sup> and successfully go through entry controls. In standard visiting rooms, individuals may only have physical contact with visitors at the start and end of each visit.

## 3.2 Method

### Participants

This study used data from the Dutch Prison Visitation Study (DPVS), which is a part of the Life in Custody (LIC) study; a large-scale study on prison climate in Dutch prisons (Palmen et al., 2019; Van Ginneken et. al, 2018). The Prison Climate Questionnaire (PCQ, Bosma et al., 2020) was used to measure how individuals in various regimes experience their incarceration; these survey data were matched (with permission) to administrative data on individual-level demographic and criminal characteristics.

The DPVS targeted the full population of male and female persons, in all regimes, who were incarcerated between January and April 2017 in one of the 28 operating Dutch

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1 Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, video visits became available in all Dutch prisons. At the time of this research (2017), that was not the case.

2 Incarcerated individuals fill in a list of personal information for all potential visitors (the so-called 'visitors form' for 10-15 persons).

prisons ( $N = 7,109$ ). In total, 6,088 individuals could be reached<sup>3</sup> to take part in the study. Of those approached, 4,938 individuals participated in the study. In total, 4,538 also gave permission to match their survey data to administrative data. Individuals in open regimes were excluded ( $N = 162$ ) since they do not receive visits in prison as they can see family and friends while on furlough. The final sample therefore consisted of 4,376 incarcerated males and females, in various regimes (pretrial detention, regular prison, extra care, persistent offenders, police arrestees and half open regimes). Prior research within the LIC study has shown that this group is representative for the total Dutch prison population (for more details see Van Ginneken et al., 2018).

### **Measures**

This study uses survey and administrative data for 4,376 participants of the LIC study. The PCQ provides information about how often and from whom individuals received visits in the three months prior to the data collection, in addition to information about the social network of individuals and how much contact they had with diverse relationships prior to incarceration. The administrative data comes from a national system that tracks individual-level information (TULP) and includes information on criminal and incarceration history, such as time served, index offense, as well as demographic characteristics (such as age).

### **Receiving Visits in Prison**

Through the PCQ, participants were asked how often they received visits from partner, child(ren), family, and friends in the three months prior to the data collection. A period of three months was chosen since individuals are typically incarcerated for a short period of time in the Netherlands (De Loeff et al., 2018). Thus, this time period is relevant for the Dutch incarceration context and also helps reduce recall bias.

For individuals who were incarcerated for less than three months, these questions concerned the time since admission. Answers were dichotomized to indicate whether an individual had received at least one visit (0 = no, 1 = yes). Next to this global measure, we also created indicators of whether individuals received visits from partner, child(ren), family, and friends.

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3 Some individuals could not be reached for practical reasons ( $N = 548$ ), for example because they were released during the data collection week. Other individuals ( $N = 473$ ) could not be approached because of language problems, severe psychological problems, or being placed in isolation during the data collection week.

### **Social Network Characteristics**

To gain insight into an individuals' social network, participants were asked whether they had a partner, meaning a relationship that has lasted at least three months (0 = no, 1 = yes). Participants were also asked whether they had child(ren), including biological children, stepchildren, and foster or adopted children (0 = no, 1 = yes). Table 3.1 provides descriptive statistics for all the variables, indicating that slightly more than half of the sample reported having a partner and at least one child.

Participants were also asked on a scale from never to daily about how often they had contact with partner, child(ren), parents, family, and friends three months prior to incarceration. Considering the skewed distribution (most participants reported having at least weekly contact), we decided to construct a dichotomous indicator of contact prior to incarceration (0 = less than weekly contact, 1 = at least weekly contact). Participants had the most contact with partner prior to incarceration, followed by friends, family, and parents (see Table 3.1).

### **Criminal History**

Three measures of criminal history were investigated. First, 'index offense' concerns the offense for which an individual was suspected or convicted for, which included: violent, property, sex, drugs and other. The largest group was incarcerated for a property offense (42%), followed by violent offense (31%), drug offense (17%), sex offense (5%) and other offense (6%). For a small group of participants the index offense was unknown ( $N = 585$ ). Second, 'first imprisonment' indicates whether it is the first time a person has been incarcerated (0 = no, 1 = yes). This was the case for 42% of the sample (see Table 3.1). Third, 'time served' indicates the amount of time between entry into this prison and the data collection. This variable distinguishes between individuals who were in prison relatively short (0 = 0 – 3 months) versus relatively long (1 = more than three months). Table 3.1 shows that 52% of the sample was in this prison for longer than three months, which means for nearly half of our sample the recall period of three months encompasses their entire prison stay.

### **Control Variables**

Several demographic characteristics known in the literature to be important for visitation were included in the analyses, namely: age, gender, and ethnicity. Moreover, we also controlled for whether individuals participated in the basic (0) or plus program (1). This is important to control for since individuals in the plus program can earn extra visits as a reward for good behavior (Van Gent, 2013). Most of our sample is older than 30 (66%), mainly male (95%), and have a western ethnic

background (72%). Around 35% of our sample was in the plus program at the time of the data collection (see Table 3.1).

**Table 3.1** Descriptive Statistics (N = 4,376)

	Prop.	Min.	Max.
<b>Visited by</b>			
Anyone	0.72	0	1
Partner	0.71	0	1
Child	0.51	0	1
Family	0.57	0	1
Friend	0.48	0	1
<b>Social network characteristics</b>			
Has a partner	0.58	0	1
Has a child	0.59	0	1
Weekly contact with			
Partner	0.91	0	1
Child(ren)	0.74	0	1
Parents	0.56	0	1
Family	0.58	0	1
Friends	0.68	0	1
<b>Criminal history</b>			
Index offense			
Property	0.42	0	1
Violent	0.31	0	1
Sex	0.05	0	1
Drugs	0.17	0	1
Other	0.06	0	1
First imprisonment	0.42	0	1
Time served (longer than 3 months)	0.52	0	1
<b>Control variables</b>			
Age (older than 30)	0.66	0	1
Gender (male)	0.95	0	1
Western ethnic background	0.72	0	1
Plus program	0.35	0	1

Note. Indications of whether an individual was visited by partner or child was only calculated for individuals who have a partner (N = 2,383) or at least one child (N = 2,455). A similar calculation was done for weekly contact with partner and child.

### Analytic Strategy

To answer the first research question concerning how many individuals receive visits and from whom they receive visits in prison, descriptive statistics were examined (Table 3.1). To answer the second and third research question multilevel logistic regression analyses were utilized. Table 3.2 shows the relationship between the independent and control variables and our global indication of whether individuals received visits (RQ 2). Table 3.3 shows the results of the models for the different visitor types (RQ 3).

Multilevel analyses were completed due to the nested nature of the data (individuals [ $N = 4,376$ ] housed in prison units [ $n = 236$ ]). It is important to control for this nesting as the practical implementation of visits differs across prison units (for example, which times and days individuals can receive visits). Consequently, it is likely that part of the variation of receiving visits can be attributed to (unmeasured) differences between prison units. To control for this clustering and correct for standard errors due to this clustering, we utilized multilevel methods. We use multilevel logistic regression analyses because the outcome variables are dichotomous (visited yes / no). The analyses were conducted using full maximum likelihood in Mplus (Muthén & Muthén, 2017).

The interclass correlation (ICC) from the empty model (not shown) shows that most of the variance in receiving visits is found at the individual-level (88.8%). The rest of the variance (11.2%) can be explained by unit-level factors. The ICC in the empty models ranged from 7.1% for friend visits to 10.7% for child visits. This suggests that next to individual characteristics, prison unit characteristics play a role in the receipt of visits (albeit small).

## 3.3 Results

### How Many Individuals Receive Visits and From Whom?

Table 3.1 shows that in total, 72% of the participants reported receiving at least one visit in prison. The remaining 28% of the sample did not receive visits in the three months prior to the data collection. Around 71% of participants who reported having a partner ( $N = 2,383$ ) received at least one visit from their partner. Just over half of imprisoned parents ( $N = 2,455$ ) received a visit from their child(ren). Around 57% of the sample received at least one visit from a family member and just under half of the sample (48%) received at least one visit from a friend.

### **Determinants of Prison Visits**

To provide an answer to the second research question, the determinants of receiving visits are examined for our global measure of visitation. Table 3.2 shows that many social network characteristics are associated with higher likelihoods of receiving prison visits. Having a partner or child increases the likelihood of receiving visits. Moreover, individuals who had weekly contact with a partner, child(ren), parents, and friends prior to incarceration were more likely to receive visits than individuals with less contact. This association was strongest for contact with partner. These results are in line with the social support theory which assumes that individuals who have more social ties and strong relationships (measured here in terms of amount of contact) are most likely to be visited in prison. It is striking that this argument does not seem to apply to contact with family. Specifically, the likelihood of receiving a visit was not significantly higher for individuals who had weekly contact with their family prior to incarceration when compared to those who had less contact with their family prior to incarceration.

Next to characteristics of the social network, criminal history was also associated with receiving visits. Individuals who were incarcerated for a violent offense (OR = 1.14,  $p < .01$ ) or drug offense (OR = 1.64,  $p < .01$ ) were more likely to be visited than individuals who were incarcerated for a property offense. In contrast to prior research, sex offenders were no less likely to receive visits than individuals incarcerated for a property offense. The results also demonstrate that individuals who were incarcerated for the first time were more likely to be visited than individuals who had experienced multiple incarcerations (OR = 1.29,  $p < .01$ ). The amount of time served in this prison also had a strong association with receiving visits: individuals who served longer than three months were more likely to be visited than individuals who were in prison for shorter than three months (OR = 2.02,  $p < .001$ ).

In terms of control variables, being young, male and having a western ethnic background significantly increased the likelihood of receiving a visit. Moreover, individuals in the plus program had 57% higher odds of receiving visits than individuals in the basic program. This suggest that having more opportunities to receive visits is associated with a higher likelihood of receiving visits.

**Table 3.2** Multilevel Model on the Receipt of a Visit

	Visited		
	B	SE	Exp(B)
<b>Social network characteristics</b>			
Has a partner	0.70***	0.09	2.01
Has a child	0.42***	0.10	1.52
Weekly contact with			
Partner	0.93***	0.15	2.52
Child(ren)	0.49**	0.14	1.63
Parents	0.41***	0.11	1.51
Family	0.10	0.11	1.11
Friends	0.34**	0.11	1.41
<b>Criminal history</b>			
Index offense			
Property	Ref	Ref	Ref
Violent	0.35**	0.12	1.14
Sex	0.25	0.23	1.29
Drugs	0.50**	0.16	1.64
Other	0.19	0.19	1.21
First imprisonment	0.25**	0.09	1.29
Time served (longer than 3 months)	0.70***	0.11	2.02
<b>Control variables</b>			
Age (older than 30)	-0.63***	0.11	0.53
Gender (male)	0.65***	0.19	1.92
Western ethnic background	0.33**	0.10	1.38
Plus program	0.45***	0.12	1.57
Constant	2.45***	0.27	
N	4,376		

Note. \* $p < .05$ ; \*\* $p < .01$ ; \*\*\* $p < .001$

### Determinants of Specific Visitors

For the third research question, we investigated whether these determinants differ across visitor types. The results are discussed below for each visitor type and can be found in Table 3.3.

### **Partner Visit**

As shown in Table 3.3, weekly contact with a partner prior to incarceration had, by far, the strongest positive association with receiving a partner visit (OR = 7.15,  $p < .001$ ). Having a child also increased the likelihood of receiving a visit from partner (OR = 1.7,  $p < .001$ ), perhaps because partners accompany child(ren) to visit.

Strikingly, none of the measures of criminal history were associated with partner visits, except for time served. This suggests that stigma may play a smaller role in intimate relationships (which could also be because the partner was already aware of the individuals' criminal involvement before their imprisonment). Individuals who were in prison for longer than three months were more likely to be visited by a partner than individuals who served less than three months. The results also indicate that the likelihood of receiving a partner visit was higher for younger individuals (OR = 0.54,  $p < .001$ ), males (OR = 2.67,  $p < .01$ ), and individuals in the plus program (OR = 1.61,  $p < .01$ ).

### **Child Visit**

The results for receiving a child visit also supports notions from social support theory. Individuals who had weekly contact with their child(ren) prior to incarceration were most likely to receive a visit from them while incarcerated (OR = 7.30,  $p < .001$ ). Perhaps more frequent contact prior to incarceration reflects that a parent had an active role in raising the child(ren). This could also explain why individuals who had a partner were more likely to be visited by children than singles (OR = 2.18,  $p < .001$ ),

Regarding criminal history, the results demonstrate that individuals incarcerated for a sex offense were significantly less likely to receive a child visit (OR = 0.51,  $p < .05$ ) in comparison to individuals incarcerated for a property offense. No associations were found for the other index offenses. In line with expectations from labelling theory, individuals who were incarcerated for the first time were more likely to receive a visit from their child(ren) than individuals with a more extensive incarceration history (OR = 1.48,  $p < .001$ ). Also, individuals serving longer than three months in prison were 77% more likely to receive a child visit than those serving less than three months in prison. It is possible that individuals serving shorter periods in prison decide to spare their children from potential negative experiences of coming to visit. In terms of control variables, individuals in the plus program were more likely to receive a child visit than individuals in the basic program. All other control variables were not associated with receiving child visits.

**Table 3.3** Multilevel Models on the Likelihood of Receiving Partner, Child, Family, and Friend Visits

	Partner visit			Child visit		
	B	SE	Exp(B)	B	SE	Exp(B)
<b>Social network characteristics</b>						
Has a partner	-	-	-	0.78***	0.11	2.18
Has a child	0.53***	0.11	1.70	-	-	-
Weekly contact with						
Partner	1.97***	0.18	7.15	-	-	-
Child(ren)	-	-	-	1.99***	0.13	7.30
Parents	-	-	-	-	-	-
Family	-	-	-	-	-	-
Friends	-	-	-	-	-	-
<b>Criminal history</b>						
Index offense						
Property	Ref	Ref	Ref	Ref	Ref	Ref
Violent	0.22	0.14	1.25	0.29	0.15	1.33
Sex	-0.02	0.28	0.98	-0.67*	0.28	0.51
Drugs	0.17	0.18	1.18	0.34	0.19	1.40
Other	0.29	0.22	1.34	-0.11	0.25	0.89
First imprisonment	-0.09	0.11	0.92	0.39***	0.11	1.48
Time served (longer than 3 months)	0.54***	0.13	1.72	0.57***	0.13	1.77
<b>Control variables</b>						
Age (older than 30)	-0.61***	0.13	0.54	-0.10	0.13	0.91
Gender (male)	0.98**	0.29	2.67	0.18	0.18	1.20
Western ethnic background	0.09	0.13	1.09	0.15	0.13	1.16
Plus program	0.47**	0.14	1.61	0.38**	0.13	1.47
Constant	2.31***	0.36		2.99***	0.28	
N	2,383			2,455		

Note. \* $p < .05$ ; \*\* $p < .01$ ; \*\*\* $p < .001$

The prevalence and determinants of visits from partner, child(ren), family, and friends in prisons

Family visit			Friend visit		
B	SE	Exp(B)	B	SE	Exp(B)
0.24**	0.09	1.27	0.23**	0.08	1.26
0.17	0.09	1.18	0.01	0.09	1.01
-	-	-	-	-	-
-	-	-	-	-	-
0.94***	0.09	2.55	-	-	-
0.88***	0.09	2.42	-	-	-
-	-	-	1.48***	0.08	4.38
Ref	Ref	Ref	Ref	Ref	Ref
0.31**	0.11	1.36	0.14	0.11	1.15
0.63**	0.21	1.87	-0.51**	0.19	0.60
0.26	0.14	1.29	0.37**	0.12	1.44
0.00	0.18	1.00	0.10	0.16	1.11
0.22**	0.08	1.25	0.16	0.09	1.17
0.64***	0.09	1.89	0.45***	0.1	1.56
-0.68***	0.09	0.51	-0.59***	0.09	0.56
0.80***	0.19	2.22	0.75***	0.21	2.12
0.35***	0.09	1.43	0.21**	0.09	1.23
0.46***	0.10	1.59	0.47***	0.10	1.60
2.31***	0.26		2.34***	0.25	
4,376			4,376		

### **Family Visit**

In agreement with expectations from social support theory, weekly contact with parents and family prior to incarceration significantly was associated with a higher likelihood of receiving a visit from a family member. In addition, individuals who had a partner (OR = 1.27,  $p < .01$ ) were more likely to receive a family visit than singles.

For criminal history, the results in Table 3.3 show that individuals incarcerated for a violent offense were more likely to be visited by a family member in comparison to individuals who were incarcerated for a property offense (OR = 1.35,  $p < .01$ ). Also, individuals incarcerated for sex offenses were nearly twice as likely to receive a family visit in comparison to property offenders. No significant associations were found for other offense types. Additionally, the analyses demonstrate that individuals who were incarcerated for the first time were 25% more likely to receive a visit from family than individuals who had been incarcerated more often. Moreover, individuals who were in prison longer than three months were more likely to receive visits from family members (OR = 1.89,  $p < .001$ ).

In terms of control variables, family visits were more likely when individuals were younger than 30 (OR = 0.51,  $p < .001$ ), male (OR = 2.22,  $p < .001$ ), had a western ethnic background (OR = 1.43,  $p < .001$ ), or participated in the plus program (OR = 1.59,  $p < .001$ ).

### **Friend Visit**

The results of the multilevel analyses show that weekly contact prior to incarceration with friends was also strongly associated with whether individuals received a visit from a friend during incarceration (OR = 4.38,  $p < .001$ ). Additionally, individuals who reported having a partner (OR = 1.26,  $p < .01$ ) were also more likely to receive a friends visit than singles.

The results further show that sex offenders were less likely to receive a friends visit (OR = 0.60,  $p < .01$ ), while individuals incarcerated for a drug offense were more likely to receive a friends visit (OR = 1.44,  $p < .01$ ), when compared to individuals incarcerated for a property offense. Moreover, individuals who served longer than three months had 56% higher odds of receiving a friends visit than individuals who served shorter periods. No significant differences were found concerning incarceration history. Finally, being younger than 30 (OR = 0.56,  $p < .001$ ), male (OR = 2.12,  $p < .001$ ), having a western ethnic background (OR = 1.23,  $p < .01$ ), and participating in the plus program (OR = 1.60,  $p < .001$ ) was related to higher likelihoods of receiving a friends visit.

## 3.4 Discussion

After recent efforts both in policy and practice to improve visitation in Dutch prisons, this study presented current information about the prevalence of prison visits, including prevalence numbers of who comes to visit. Based on theoretical expectations from social support theory and labeling theory, this study tested to what extent social network characteristics and criminal history are related to receiving visits in prison generally, and from different types of relationships. To answer this question, rich survey data from 4,376 males and females incarcerated in the Netherlands were used. This study is therefore the first large-scale, multilevel study on the determinants of visits in Dutch prisons.

### Interpreting the Results

The results of this large-scale study show that most individuals incarcerated in a Dutch prison received at least one visit in the past three months (72%). This rate is higher than what U.S. based studies have reported (although visitation rates can also greatly vary across U.S. states) but supports previous research on adults incarcerated in the Netherlands (Moerings, 1978; Janssen, 2000). In addition, the prevalence of visits from partner, children, family, and friends is also similar to prior Dutch studies. This is quite surprising considering the recent initiatives taken to encourage visits, especially from children. The results of this study show that only half of incarcerated parents saw their children in the three months prior to the survey collection.

Three key findings emerged from our analysis. First, having a strong and large social network *prior* to incarceration is associated with whether individuals receive visits. The multilevel analyses demonstrated that indicators of strong relationships, such as having strong social ties, were associated with a higher likelihood of receiving visits (this was true for all relationships). Similarly, having a partner also increased the odds of being visited. This finding is in line with prior research demonstrating that individuals who have a partner generally have larger social networks and more access to social capital (Clark & Duwe, 2017). Our results further support this research by demonstrating that having a partner also increased the odds of receiving a visit from children, family, and friends. Partners therefore seem to be an important link in a social network. Taken together, these results support notions from social support theory which underscore that visits are more likely for incarcerated individuals with stronger social networks. Evidence of this finding was already found among pretrial

detainees in the Netherlands (Hickert et al., 2019) but now these results can be generalized to the entire prison population since the sample used in this study is representative for the Dutch prison population.

Second, individuals who were incarcerated for longer than three months were more likely to be visited than those with short terms of confinement. This result was consistent across all visitor types. While this may be because individuals who have been in prison for a shorter period of time have had less time to receive visits, results indicate that 61% of individuals incarcerated for less than three months did receive visits. Therefore, this argument does not seem to fully explain our results, which is still surprising in light of the labeling theory. In particular, the labeling theory assumes that individuals who have a shorter stay in prison would be more likely to be visited (since having a longer stay in prison would put off a more negative signal than a shorter stay, Moerings, 1978). Both national and international research suggest some possibilities to explain these result (Pleggenkuhle et al., 2018). It is possible that when prison terms are short some individuals opt out of visits to save their family practical and emotional hardship. Thus, some individuals may actively choose to not receive visits.

Third, index offense and incarceration history appeared less related to whether individuals receive visits than as suggested by labeling theory. Additionally, prior research also suggests that individuals with more extensive criminal histories and who have committed a more serious offense are least likely to receive visits. The results of this study, however, show that this is only true for certain types of visitors. For example, individuals committed for a sex offense were less likely to receive visits from children and friends but were more likely to be visited by parents (in comparison to individuals committed for a property offense). Also, a more extensive incarceration history was only related to lower prevalence of child- and family visits. Based on prior research these groups were deemed 'vulnerable', but our results demonstrate that these individuals do keep in contact with some of their relationships. Another striking result was that criminal history was not related to partner visits. This suggests that partners visit despite stigma. This may be because partners, perhaps more so than other relationships, were already aware of criminal activity. These results emphasize the importance of examining different types of visitors when studying the determinants of visitation.

### **Study Limitations**

The findings of this study need to be considered in light of a few methodological limitations. This study used a cross-sectional design, which means it is not possible

to make statements about causality. Also, since visits were measured at one moment, it is not possible to examine how visitation patterns change across an incarceration period. Prior research suggest that visits are patterned, differing in timing and consistency (Cochran & Mears, 2013). For example, some individuals are visited a lot at the start of their imprisonment, but as time passes visits may become less frequent. Therefore, future research should be done longitudinally to capture these variations across time, including variations in who comes to visit. This is important as visits in Dutch prisons are limited to one (maximally two) hours of visits, which could mean that individuals must make a trade-off with who comes to visit each time.

### **Implications for Policy & Research**

Despite these limitations, this study demonstrates that a strong social network is important for receiving visits while incarcerated. However, it is not necessarily the case that individuals who do not receive visits have no contact with family and friends. Nearly 80% of individuals who did not receive visits in our sample had contact with their social network via phone. Another 30% also had contact via letters. In other words, the third of our sample who did not receive visits did in many cases have contact with their network outside the prison walls. Nonetheless, international research increasingly supports that prison visits, in and of themselves, are especially important for reentry success (Hickert et al., 2019; Mitchell et al., 2016). It is therefore important to increase our understanding of why some individuals are not visited in prison. Interviews with these individuals would help improve our understanding of the problems they may face and their deliberations concerning visits. Future research could also focus on underlying sociological or psychological characteristics, such as personality traits, to understand why some individuals are not visited. In addition, more specific information about criminal history, including the circumstances that lead to the imprisonment, could also be interesting avenues for future research. It is possible that offenses committed in domestic settings could have a larger impact on family and consequently, the contact with them in prison. Finally, developments and changes in offending behavior could also improve understanding. In light of the labeling theory, it is possible that individuals do not receive visits because their offenses have gotten more serious. Future research thus should include more detailed information about personal and social context from individuals and their criminal history.

In current correctional practice a strong social network is seen as an important condition for a successful reentry. Therefore, more attention is paid to screening

for problems in this area (such as case managers now ask about the social network in their standard intake screening). Given the results of this study, screening for these problems is an essential first step. Our findings suggest that it may be useful to screen for how recent an individual had contact with family and friends in the months prior to incarceration and the family situation (such as whether they have partner or child), since these individuals are less likely to be visited in prison. Recent initiatives concerning social network could also be intensified for groups identified to be vulnerable in this study, which includes older individuals and individuals with a non-Western ethnic background.

Another striking result of this study was that individual in the plus program (who have an extra hour of visits per week and are given preference for weekend and evening visits) was associated with higher visit prevalence (also for partner and friend visits). This suggests that practical challenges, such as the limited visiting hours, may impede some individuals from receiving visits. More research is needed to know what aspects may create barriers to visits. For example, a report from the Inspection of Ministry of Justice and Security detailed those visiting hours and days did not match well with visitors' schedules (Bos, 2013). Comprehensive research could provide insight into these practical barriers.

Another way to examine how prison policies influence how many individuals receive visits is to do comparative research. An interesting case study could be a comparison of visit rates between the Netherlands and Belgium, since Belgian penitentiary laws allow more visits than Dutch laws. Individuals in pretrial detention in Belgium can receive visits every day and convicted individuals have the right to three visits per week (of which at least one must be available in the weekend or on a Wednesday afternoon so that children who go to school are able to visit, Belgian Penitentiary Principles Act, Article 58). Even though not all Belgian prisons are able to implement these rules in practice (Eechaudt, 2017), it would be interesting to compare visitation rates in these two countries to see whether there is further evidence for increased visit possibilities being related to higher prevalence. Quantitative research on prison visitation in Belgium is rare due to difficulties in obtaining prison administrative data (Beyens et al., 2014), which makes it challenging to compare.

Lastly, to provide a more comprehensive view of the factors impacting visitation, scholars should include visitors' perspectives in their research. Visitors must also decide whether they are willing to take the effort to travel to the prison for visits and pay (in terms of time and money) for visits. These considerations likely depend on their financial situation, how far they have to travel, and the strength

of their relationship with the incarcerated individual (Christian, 2005). Moreover, their experiences during visits could also impact whether they continue to visit an incarcerated individual. Qualitative accounts have detailed how visitors sometimes choose to stop visiting due to negative experiences (Comfort, 2016). A comparative study between the Netherlands and Belgium showed that visitors' experiences depend on how visits are arranged, which again points to the potential impact of visitation policies on whether and how visits are experienced (Beyens et al., 2013). Notably, recent pilots have been undertaken to improve visitors' experiences which could help minimize barriers to visiting. More research is needed to know whether these changes actually increase the number of individuals receiving visits in prison. The 2019 data collection from the Dutch Prison Visitation Study (a part of the LIC study), included questions about these practical barriers and visitation experiences among incarcerated individuals and their visitors.

### **Conclusion**

National and international research demonstrates that receiving visits during prison is important (Brunton-Smith & McCarthy, 2017; Hickert et al., 2019). Loss of social contact while incarcerated can deteriorate existing relationships, increase feelings of social isolation after release, and increase recidivism (Cochran & Mears, 2013; Mitchell et al., 2016; Moerings, 1978). The results of this study suggest that having strong social bonds and a partner prior to incarceration are related to receiving visits in prison, as well as having more opportunities to receive visits. These factors were important for receiving visits across various relationship types. In addition, a few measures of criminal history were associated with receiving visits but appeared to be less impactful than social network characteristics and varied across visitors.

The findings provide an important base for future research to identify why one in four individuals incarcerated in the Netherlands does not receive visits. Making inventories of a person's social network at the beginning of the prison term seems valuable as individuals with little to no contact prior to incarceration are less likely to receive visits in prison. Therefore the increased attention in both the Netherlands and Belgium for a person's social network seems promising. But, in order to know what is necessary to build and strengthen supportive ties, more research is needed. Policy and programs can only be developed once we know more about why some individuals are not visited in order to diminish differences between individuals. Ultimately, this knowledge should help develop and improve our understanding of visitation, its impacts, and likelihood across people.

