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

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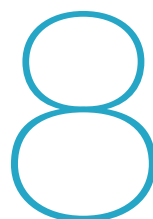
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General discussion

8.1 Introduction

Within the corrections field worldwide, it has long been held that contact with the outside world is especially important for helping individuals both during and after imprisonment. One of the few ways individuals can have meaningful contact with the outside world while incarcerated is through prison visits. Prison visitation has steadily gained academic attention in the past decade as theoretical accounts highlight that receiving visits in prison is beneficial and empirical studies largely reinforce this, leading to increased calls for stimulating prison visits. Yet not all results lead to unequivocal conclusions, and little is known about whether, how often, and from whom individuals receive visits and under which circumstances visits affect behavior, especially across different contexts and populations. Work on this topic is complicated as visitation is a heterogeneous experience and researchers rarely have comprehensive measures of visitation. Individuals can, for example, be visited at different times in their prison term; some are visited only once while others are visited on a weekly basis; individuals receive visits from a range of relationships and have diverse experiences during visits. Moreover, the social and incarceration contexts in which visits take place are complex and include a wide range of actors who have diverse interests and concerns. This underscores the need for holistic research and rigorous investigations into visitation and its effects.

Against this backdrop, this dissertation sought to provide a comprehensive description and examination of prison visitation in the Netherlands. Since this dissertation is one of the first to examine visits in Dutch prisons on a large-scale, the first aim was relatively explorative: to describe how visitation works in law, policy, and practice. Both the legal and correctional context were considered to provide an overview of the legal basis of prison visits, how visits are implemented in policy and practice, and to explore the contours of how prison administrators use their discretion to prescribe visitation policies. Detailing these contextual aspects was an important starting point given the novelty of visitation research in contexts outside the U.S.

Then, building on this contextual knowledge, this dissertation further aimed to advance our understanding of the determinants and consequences of prison visitation. These aims were pursued by a) including multifaceted measures of visitation from several sources to specify and nuance our explorations of prison visits, b) using a holistic approach to study individual as well as contextual aspects of visitation, c) applying rigorous multilevel tests to empirically investigate under

which circumstances visits affect (which type of) offending behavior, and d) assessing the robustness and generalizability of prior research by exploring the determinants and consequences of prison visitation among individuals incarcerated in the Netherlands.

To accomplish these aims, data was used from the Dutch Prison Visitation Study (DPVS) which combines information from multiple data sources to capture the complexities of prison visitation. Data on whether, how often, and from whom individuals received visits while incarcerated was collected via self-report (Prison Climate Questionnaire, PCQ, Bosma 2020a), and was available for a nationally representative group of over 4,000 incarcerated adults. Individuals were also asked about their visitation experiences in the PCQ. In addition, for a subsample of over 1,000 adult males housed in eight prisons geographically spread throughout the Netherlands, detailed prison administrative data was available. Administrative data further provided longitudinal data about the timing and patterning of visits across the entire prison term. In addition, by means of site visits, data was collected on the set-up and organization of visitation. To test visits' effects, information on misconduct (including aggressive misconduct, contraband, and general rule breaking) and recidivism was collected from official prison and criminal records. Finally, data on diverse individual and prison unit characteristics known to be important for visits and its effects, such as social support prior to incarceration, were included in the analyses.

This final chapter first provides a summary of the main results (see also w 8.1) and then reflects on how these results fit the theoretical frameworks discussed in the introduction. Thereafter, the strengths and limitations of the current dissertation and avenues for future research are discussed. This chapter concludes with implications of these findings for correctional policy and practice.

8.2 Summary of main results

Part I: The Visitation Context in the Netherlands

To provide an overview of how prison visitation works in Dutch law, policy, and practice, Chapter 2 investigated the current state of affairs of prison visitation in the Netherlands by examining legal documents and case law about visitation, talking to prison staff involved with visits, and conducting observations in all Dutch prisons. By law, incarcerated adults have a right to one hour of standard visits per week, meaning visits from partner, parents, children, family, or friends (Article 38, Section 1 of the Penitentiary Principles Act). In comparison to some other European countries

(like Belgium, see for example Eechaudt, 2017), the amount of visitation legally allowed in Dutch prisons could be considered restrictive. That said, policy changes in the past ten years have expanded visit possibilities in Dutch prisons. Incarcerated parents are offered more possibilities to see their children, individuals can receive an extra hour of visits per week (maximally two hours) through a behavioral incentive program, and conjugal visits have been made available to individuals in pretrial regimes as opposed to only being available in prison regimes.

In practice, the conditions and forms of visitation look similar across prisons. Generally, incarcerated individuals are responsible for planning their visits, the set-up of visiting rooms is quite uniform, the same types of visits are offered (i.e., standard visits, conjugal visits, and special family visits), and security measures and procedures are consistent. However, some prisons clearly had adopted more *flexible* practices (such as having weekend visits or allowing individuals to choose visits on various time slots spread across several days), which could make it possible for more individuals to receive visits or for certain relationships to visit (especially for those with less flexible schedules, like children). Bivariate analyses of DPVS participants indicated that these differences between prisons, as well as differences between individuals (such as age and ethnicity), are related to whether and how often individuals receive visits.

In sum, Part I demonstrated how the 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 individual and staff in prison, while also trying to encourage contact with the outside world. Notable too is the focus of many policy directives and research pilots on parent-child relationship and improving child visits. Finally, it is evident that – while all individuals have a right to one hour of visits per week – the practical implementation of this right looks different across prisons. There are several possible reasons for this, including sharp budget cuts, the incorporation of managerial discourse in penal policy, and differences in the ethos of prison governors. While exploratory bivariate analyses in Chapter 2 do indicate that such differences (as well as individual differences) may impact the receipt of visits, multivariate analyses are needed to control for the number of determinants at play, to which I now turn.

Part II: The Determinants of Visitation

Chapter 3 and 4 of this dissertation provided insight into the determinants of prison visitation. Chapter 3 focused on to what extent visits are determined by

individual characteristics. The central research question was to what extent social network characteristics (e.g., family situation, contact prior to incarceration) and criminal history (e.g., index offense, prior incarcerations, incarceration length) relate to receiving partner, child, family, and friend visits. Self-reported visitation data from 4,376 incarcerated males and females in diverse prison regimes were used, making this the first large-scale study of the determinants of prison visits in the Netherlands. The results indicated that nearly one-third of individuals did not receive a visit in the three months prior to the data collection. Individuals who had a strong and large social network prior to incarceration were more likely to be visited in prison than those who had limited contact with their social network prior to incarceration, were single, and did not have children. A few measures of criminal history were associated with receiving visits (such as, individuals with a more extensive incarceration history were less likely to receive visits) but appeared to be less impactful than social network characteristics and varied across visitors. For example, although certain groups appeared at first to be less likely to receive visits, such as sex offenders, when specific relationships were considered, it became clear that such groups were only less likely to receive visits from *certain* relationships (in the case of sex offenders: children and friends).

Building upon these observations, Chapter 4 broadened the focus from individual characteristics to include more contextual influences (such as prison policies and experiences during visits). Specifically, this chapter investigated how practical, relational, and experiential (that is, experiences during incarceration) factors explain variation in whether and from whom individuals receive visits. Moreover, Chapter 4 tests how these factors relate to how often individuals are visited. This is important as it can be assumed that some factors, such as offense seriousness, may strongly impact the likelihood of the first visit, but exert limited effects on having many visits. A combination of survey and administrative data on visits were used and detailed information about the set-up and organization of visits for each prison unit were added to investigate how visitation policies affect the receipt and frequency of visits. The results of the multilevel analyses showed (similarly to Chapter 3) that having a strong network prior or during incarceration is important for visits. However, even when visitors may have a close relationship with the incarcerated individual, far travelling distances still seem to hinder them from visiting frequently. The results further showed that having visits available on more days during the week increased the odds of receiving visits from parents and friends. Such flexible policies appear to be especially important for relationships who are less willing, or able to take time off work, as having weekend visits also increased the likelihood and frequency of

friend visits. Relatedly, providing more opportunities to receive visits, especially at desirable times, was related to more frequent visits. Finally, the findings further demonstrated that individuals who had positive emotional experiences during visits were visited more frequently, specifically by partner and family. This suggests that incarcerated individuals make willful and active decisions about visits based, in part, on their visit experiences.

Taken together, Part II demonstrated that practical, relational, and experiential factors play out at once to influence whether, how often, and from whom individuals receive visits in prison. Importantly, this part of the dissertation indicated that visitation policies – assumed to be consequential for whether and how often individuals can receive visits, but rarely tested – do seem to impact access to external social ties. That said, the studied policies appeared to have less of an impact than expected. This may, in part, be because visitation policies look relatively similar across prisons in the Netherlands (i.e., most prisons have visiting hours during the week and are typically one hour long). It is possible that visitation policies may exert a greater influence in other contexts where differences between facilities are more extreme (such as in the U.S). Generally though, the findings from Chapter 3 and 4 (particularly concerning individuals' social networks and the impact of travelling distance on visitation) provided some empirical support for the generalizability of prior research on prison visitation in the U.S. to the visitation context of the Netherlands. This suggests that these broad categories of factor might be more universal, and perhaps informative for other incarceration and visitation contexts in Western Europe.

Part III: The Consequences of Visitation

Chapter 5, 6, and 7 focused on the consequences of receiving prison visits on offending behavior in prison and after release. Chapter 5 investigated how several operationalizations of visits – whether individuals received visits, the type of visitor received, and how often they received visits – related to aggression (including both verbally and physically aggressive behaviors) and contraband misconduct. Multilevel techniques were utilized with self-report (visitation) and administrative (aggressive and contraband misconduct) data from a sample of 3,885 males and females housed in 230 prison units. The results demonstrated that receiving visits in prison, especially visits from partner and friends, was primarily related to an *increased* likelihood of (drug-related) contraband misconduct. Receiving visits was not associated with verbally aggressive behavior, but individuals who received visits from friends were *less* likely to engage in physically aggressive behaviors.

Contrastingly, weekly visits from friends increased the likelihood of aggressive misconduct. This association was found for aggressive behaviors towards things (i.e., destruction of property), suggesting that these visits may be stressful or frustrating. The frequency of visits did not relate to contraband, which suggest that who is visiting matters more for understanding contraband misconduct than how often one receives visits.

In Chapter 6, week-to-week associations between misconduct and prison visits (including visits from partner, family, friend, child, and official visitors) were explored *within* individuals. This design was applied to eliminate potential confounds and to isolate the short-term effects of visits on individuals' engagement in misconduct in the weeks prior to and following visits. The results showed that an individuals' risk of infraction is similar to average levels in the weeks leading up to a visit, increases up to 18% in the weeks following a visit, and then returns to baseline levels. This pattern was found for contraband infractions, but visits had little to no effect on aggressive infractions and rule breaking. Visits' effects varied based on who is visiting (but child and friend visits did not affect misconduct). Strongest effects were found for family and official visits. Exploratory analyses revealed that official visits increased an individuals' risk of aggressive infractions but had no significant effects on contraband infractions or rule breaking. This suggests that these visits may bring disappointment, stress, or frustration in addressing legal or reintegration needs. Finally, the findings showed that when individuals are visited frequently, the risk of infractions postvisit is similar to average levels, indicating that frequent visits may temper any 'harmful' effects of visits.

Finally, Chapter 7 examined whether visitation patterns – that is, differences in timing, rate, and consistency of visits while incarcerated – related to post-release offending for a subsample of DPVS participants released in 2017 with administrative data on visits. To identify visitation patterns, group-based trajectory models were used. Individuals incarcerated in the Netherlands tend to experience one of the five patterns of visitation: never visited, sporadically visited (a consistent, low number of visits), decreasingly visited (a decrease in the number of visits leading up to release), increasingly visited (an increase in the number of visits in the months before release), and often visited (a consistent, high number of visits). Then, logistic regression models tested whether these patterns relate to reconviction up to two years after release for all offending and serious offending (meaning, any offense with a maximum sentence of four years' incarceration and higher, or any offense that allows for the imposition of pretrial detention). The results demonstrated that consistent, frequent visitation and visits near release are linked to reductions in

all and serious offending within six months after release even when controlling for important individual differences. Other patterns, including receiving sporadic visits or experiencing a decrease in visits prior to release, were not associated with recidivism. Within two years of release, consistent, frequent visitation was still related to recidivism, but the effect seemed to attenuate.

In short, Part III showed that receiving visits in prison may not necessarily have positive behavioral outcomes in prison, but that visits do seem important for post-release offending. The relationship between visitation and misconduct is complex (as it seems to differ across visitors) and is not necessarily positive (as there is evidence of increases in contraband and of visits being stressful or upsetting). However, receiving consistent, frequent visits or visits near release – compared to never receiving visits – did relate to reductions in (serious) offending, at least in the short-term.

8.3 Theoretical Reflection

This dissertation set out to progress earlier theoretical assessments of the maintenance and importance of social ties during incarceration that have been mostly tested on American data. This section firstly reflects on the implications of the findings of this dissertation on the social ecological framework used to understand the determinants of prison visits and then on various criminological theories that link receiving visits to offending behavior.

Reflection on a Social Ecological Model of Visitation

The current work on the determinants of prison visitation was rooted in a social ecological model of visitation, informed by the broader literature on the maintenance of social support in times of stress (Vaux, 1988). This model, applied to the prison context, theorizes that incarcerated individuals and visitors decide whether and how often they (receive) visits within the social and incarceration contexts in which they reside. Based on prior theory and research it can be assumed that three broad categories of factors are important for visitation, namely practical, relational, and experiential factors. The expectation is that these factors are interrelated as factors at one level influence factors at another level.

Even though not all practical, relational, or experiential factors that were expected to play a role in whether, how often, and from whom individuals receive visits were found to exert an influence, the results of this dissertation provide support for theoretical arguments that prison visits are a product of practical

challenges, but also the social and incarceration contexts in which individuals reside and the factors impacting prison visits differ across relationships.

Evidence of these factors playing out at once to influence visitation was found in Chapter 3 and 4. Chapter 4 showed that relational factors are important for determining whether an individual receives visits but did not necessarily dictate frequent visits (here frequent travelling distance appeared to be more pertinent). This suggests an interplay between these two sets of factors, such that those close to an individual may be willing to come visit but could have a hard time maintaining frequent contact due to practical challenges. Chapters 3 and 4 also showed that certain individual characteristics generally considered to be important predictors of visitation, such as criminal history, were less impactful when other factors were simultaneously considered. Again, this suggests that criminal history may be one of the factors considered in whether to (receive) visits but is likely not the most decisive. Unfortunately, the data did not allow for a direct test of how these factors impact one another, but these results at least emphasize that determinants from various levels need to be assessed together to estimate the effects of these factors more accurately.

Beyond the interrelated nature of these factors, the findings of Chapter 3 and 4 also demonstrate that the determinants of visitation differ across relationships. For example, criminal history only seemed to lower the likelihood of visits for certain relationships – which could be a result of stigmatization (e.g., Moerings, 1978). Notable too was that visitation policies had differential impacts on whether and how often individuals received visits from certain relationships – which could have more to do with practical issues. While the social ecological model assumes that factors predicting visits could differ across relationships because of differences in the nature of ties (e.g., familial versus friendship) and investment considerations (Arriaga & Agnew, 2001), these mechanisms were not directly investigated. A deeper understanding of the processes underlying these differences requires qualitative research. Interview data from both incarcerated individuals and visitors can help to understand how visiting decisions are made, which could create new insights for further theory development.

Reflection on Theories on the Effects of Visitation

Several criminological theories anticipate that maintaining social ties through prison visitation can prevent or reduce offending behavior. From a strain and deprivation perspective, visits can improve individuals' ability to manage the pains and stress related to incarceration, thus decreasing engagement in criminal behavior. From a

social bonds perspective, visits can strengthen bonds to family, friends, and the community which would help restrain individuals from committing crimes. This constraint may work via informal social control, as loved ones monitor individuals' behavior and encourage conformity. These bonds may also be essential for the desistance process as these connections to society could help promote a positive sense of personal identity. Finally, visits help activate and preserve important sources of emotional and instrumental support which are likely to benefit individuals in navigating the many challenges they may face during and after imprisonment. While these theories collectively suggest that visits will reduce offending behavior, quantitative and qualitative accounts have shown that visits are not uniformly positive and can have negative effects on behavior (e.g., Siennick et al., 2013).

As evident above multiple theoretical arguments have been proposed for visits' effects, but scholars rarely derive more specific hypotheses to test underlying mechanisms. This dissertation contributed to a better understanding of how specific aspects of visits (such as who is visiting) relate to specific types of offending behavior, but still more is needed to disentangle the mechanisms behind visitation effects. Nevertheless, the results of this dissertation do provide suggestive evidence to the mechanisms behind visits' effects.

First, this dissertation does not provide much evidence for strain and deprivation-related arguments. If visits act as a coping mechanism, then decreases in aggression in prison would be expected. However, Chapter 5 and 6 show that visits had little to no effects on aggression. Perhaps visits are too short to help individuals cope with the pains and stresses of life in prison. It is also possible that context plays a role, as individuals in Dutch prisons may experience the pains of imprisonment less intensely since they tend to be imprisoned for short periods of time. That said, results from Chapter 6 suggest that official visits may be stressful as these visits *increased* aggressive behavior (namely, destruction of property). These visitors have been largely disregarded in theories about visits' effects. On the one hand, this is understandable as strain and deprivation-related arguments propose that close, familial relationships are most likely to impact individuals' emotional state. On the other hand, the lack of theorizing about official visits is surprising as they are common visitors, and for some incarcerated individuals, are their only visitors. Therefore, more explorations including official visitors is justified.

Second, this dissertation suggests that the underlying mechanism of visits' effects may be more rooted in informal social control. To start, small negative associations were found between receiving visits and physically aggressive behaviors in Chapter 5. It can be expected that more serious forms (like physically

aggressive behaviors) could disappoint a visitor, whereas more minor forms (like verbally aggressive behaviors) may not be as consequential for the relationship. Likewise, visitors are less likely to disapprove of individuals using or possessing ‘harmless’ items such as a mobile phone. This could explain the results from Chapter 5 and 6 that visits were related to increased contraband infractions. This result was particularly robust as analyses using both between- and within-person designs showed these increases. Moreover, while most other theories propose a generalized effect (i.e., visits will have similar effects across visitors), theories of informal social control hypothesize that partners are important. Some estimates presented in this dissertation show evidence of this (as partners were the only visitor type that decreased the likelihood of receiving a report in the weeks surrounding a visit), but the evidence was not unequivocal (as partner visits were related to an increased likelihood of contraband infractions). Still, the finding that visits may have visitor-specific effects warrants more theoretical attention to relationship dynamics.

Third, this dissertation also suggests that visits’ effects may be linked to the activation and preservation of important sources of support for life after release. Chapter 7 demonstrated that individuals who received consistent, frequent visits *and* individuals who experienced an increase in visits prior to release were less likely to be reconvicted within six months of release in comparison to individuals who were never visited. Since these effects are mainly found in the short-term, this suggests that visits may help connect or remind individuals of the social capital available to them. Importantly, these results were found even when controlling for individuals’ pre-prison social network, which suggests that visits are related to recidivism above and beyond the existence of support prior to incarceration (Anderson et al., 2020). Thus, visits in and of themselves seem important, however, it remains unclear as to whether visits are related to the actual *provision* of practical or emotional support after release. Finally, while the association between receiving consistent, frequent visits and having lower likelihoods of reconviction *could* mean that these visits helped protect individuals from developing a criminal identity while incarcerated, other (qualitative) research is needed to examine whether and how visits impact individuals’ personal identity and the desistance process.

8.4 The Current Study & Future Research

This dissertation has taken a comprehensive approach to illuminate how visits operate in the Dutch context and to advance theory, research, and policy conversations about visitation, its impacts, and its likelihood across people. This

dissertation is among the first to provide an overview of the current state of affairs for this key aspect of prison life. In doing so, this dissertation has provided unique insight into the implementation of visitation policies in Dutch prisons. More than that, by introducing a new context to the visitation literature, this dissertation contributed to the generalizability of the determinants and consequences of prison visitation. Also, by using the context as a starting point, this dissertation shifts the focus from individuals (as common in prior work) to other actors involved in visitation.

Moreover, this study made scientific progress by empirically evaluating how practical (including visitation policies), relational, and experiential factors impact whether, how often, and from whom individuals receive visits. And by not limiting this investigation to only one set of factors, unlike much of the previous work conducted, this dissertation advanced our understanding of which factors matter most for (frequent) visitation. In addition, the current examination of the determinants of visitation applied original theoretical insights, stemming from the broader social support literature on stress and trauma.

Furthermore, methodological progress was made by using unique datasets in which various data sources on visitation were combined and advanced methodological techniques were applied. Several administrative databases were also available for the study samples, including records of specific types of misconduct and recidivism data that made it possible to study offending behavior in prison and up to two years post release from prison. Also, due to the rich amount of data available, analyses included controls for a broad range of individual and prison unit characteristics known to be important for visits and its effects.

Limitations, Methodological Challenges, and Directions for Future Research

Although the current dissertation has several strengths, there are also some limitations that need to be acknowledged and need to be considered when interpreting the findings. This section addresses these limitations and offers directions for future research.

First, although this dissertation measured visitation using diverse measures—including whether, how often, and from whom individuals receive visits and the timing and patterning of visits using both survey and administrative data, as well as detailed information about the set-up and organization of visits – our measure is by no means exhaustive. The type of visit (e.g., conjugal, family visits, official) and form (e.g., in-person, behind glass, video) are potentially important aspects but were left largely unexplored in this dissertation (with exception of official visits

in Chapter 6). Moreover, our data provided limited information on the visitation experience. While the PCQ did provide indications of whether individuals had more positive or negative experiences with visits, it would be more interesting and informative to have a dynamic measure which also differentiates between visitor types. The latter is important as experiences are likely to differ across visitor types, as a visit from a partner is not the same as a visit from parents. Also, the content of these visits likely differs. More insight is needed into what happens during a visit. What is talked about during visits? Are plans for release discussed? Are visitors supportive? Do visits contribute to changes in relationship quality? Answers to these questions are vital for understanding why some visits continue and others stop, which mechanisms are behind visits' effects and, ultimately, what is needed to improve visitation experiences. This requires a mixed-method approach involving incarcerated individuals and their visitors which combines data on visitation experience gathered through interviews, in-depth surveys, or observational studies over time with administrative data which provides details on the patterning and timing of visits as well as important behavioral outcomes.

Second, and related to the point above, our measurement of visits in most chapters concerned the period three months prior to the data collection (or if individuals were incarcerated for shorter, since entry into prison). This time frame is relevant for the Dutch prison context, as 60% of individuals are incarcerated for less than three months (de Looft et al., 2018), meaning that this measurement covers a large part of an individual's prison term. That said, for those individuals spending longer than three months in prison these measures may not fully capture their visitation experience. As evidenced in Chapter 7, visitation patterns can be identified showing that individuals may be visited a lot in some periods and in other periods visits are largely absent. It is possible that the determinants and consequences of visits look different across these patterns.

Third, although this study paid more attention to visitors and the role of prisons than prior work, the examination of these actors is limited. While some factors concerning visitors and prisons were included (such as travelling distance and visitation policies), other factors that may contribute to prison visits were not able to be included. Information on visitors' social-economic background could not be retrieved and would perhaps have been beneficial. All visitors can experience practical challenges to visit incarcerated individuals, but economically disadvantaged families may experience even greater difficulties as they are less able to afford long trips, take time off work, or arrange childcare (Rubenstein et al., 2021). Also, information on visitors' experiences should be included in future studies as

these experiences are likely to impact whether and how often visitors wish to visit. Ideally, future studies would consider not only the emotional experience, but also make an inventory of the process that family and friends must undergo to visit an incarcerated individual. Surprisingly, little is known about these matters, especially in the Netherlands. Finally, explorations of the role of prison staff in visitation could be an interesting avenue for future research. This may also help understand how certain procedures, such as writing up of reports or cell inspections, are influenced by a visit event. In sum, more comprehensive research on the multiple actors involved in prison visits is needed.

Fourth, while this dissertation did distinguish between different types of misconduct, the data on misconduct was solely from administrative data. Official records may reflect the detection and discretion of prison staff (Bosma et al., 2020b), which could mean that certain behaviors are more or less likely to result in a report. It is possible that prison staff are less likely to give a report for acts of frustration when they know that an individual had a stressful visit. Therefore it would be interesting to examine self-report measures of misconduct. It is possible that visits' effects may even be more pronounced using these data.

Fifth, this dissertation investigated the effects of visits on misconduct but did not examine the effects of visits on well-being while incarcerated. Based on strain and deprivation-related arguments, it is also predicted that visits could reduce feelings of stress, depression, and lower the risk of suicide or self-harm in prison. A handful of studies have found evidence of this (Liebling, 1999; Monahan et al., 2011; Poehlmann et al., 2008; Van Ginneken et al., 2019), but empirical research is lacking, especially among incarcerated males. Also, visits may potentially have an impact on the well-being of those beyond the prison walls affected by incarceration, but such studies are rare (Comfort, 2008; Goede, 2018). Existing qualitative accounts even suggest that visitors may have negative experiences during visits (e.g., Comfort, 2016; Dixey & Woodall, 2012), thus the impact of visits on families and friends of incarcerated individuals warrants more empirical attention.

Sixth, although parts of this dissertation were able to include a large, representative sample of individuals incarcerated in the Netherlands, several analyses were done exclusively on incarcerated males in pretrial, prison, extra care, and short-stay regimes. I do not anticipate that this will have major implications on the validity of the results for the Dutch prison population, as most incarcerated individuals are males, and the investigated regimes are the most common regimes. Yet, the results are arguably limitedly generalizable to incarcerated females. Not only did correctional staff working in women's prisons describe visits as being

“different” for women, but empirical work also suggests that the composition of visitors is different (e.g., female, romantic partners are common visitors in men’s prisons, whereas children and family members are common visitors in women’s prisons), females are more inclined to reach out to family, and their incarceration is more likely to affect children (Casey-Acevedo & Bakken, 2002; Fuller, 1993). Due to these differences, there are potentially other factors that predict who gets visited and these visits may have different consequences on behavior. I also caution with generalizing these results to individuals in open and persistent offender regimes. Generally, the results of this dissertation are less applicable for individuals in open regimes as visits are not a part of their prison programming. For individuals in persistent offender regimes it is unfortunate that administrative data was not consistent for this regime such that they could not be included in several analyses. Future studies ought to specifically examine this group of individuals as it is possible that these individuals are most likely to benefit from visits as they may lack social capital due to their history of incarceration.

In conclusion, the visitation literature would benefit from explanatory research that examines the content of visitation encounters and relationship dynamics over time, incorporates more perspectives, combines self-report and administrative data, explores visits’ effects on well-being, and investigates visitation among incarcerated females and persistent offenders. This would provide a deeper understanding of visitation and create new insights for theory development.

8.5 Implications for Correctional Policy & Practice

In July 2019, the Ministry of Justice and Security, the Dutch Prison Service, the Probation Service, and the Association of Dutch Municipalities signed a monumental administrative act ‘Providing Opportunities for Reentry’ (*Kansen bieden voor re-integratie*) which details what is needed during and after imprisonment to ensure a successful reentry for the nearly 30,000 individuals being released from prison each year. Next to the five basic conditions generally known to be important for a successful reintegration (work, income, housing, healthcare, and valid identification), this act also introduced ‘building and strengthening a supportive social network’ as a necessary condition for post-release success. Given the results of this dissertation, the recognition of the importance of social ties within these organizations is an essential first step.

As a result of this act prison-based professionals have begun to screen and monitor problems concerning the social network. For example, as part of their

standard screening upon entry into prison, case managers now ask specific questions about an individual's social network and family situation. Based on the results of this dissertation, inquiries should include questions concerning how much contact individuals had with diverse relationships in the months prior to incarceration, as individuals who had little to no contact prior to incarceration are less likely to be visited by family and friends, especially when they have a more extensive incarceration history. This dissertation also showed that certain groups are less likely to receive visits including older individuals, singles, and persons born outside the Netherlands. While these groups of individuals may still have contact with their social network via telephone or letters, current scholarship suggests that visits are necessary for maintaining the connection to avenues of social capital (Anderson et al., 2020; Hickert et al., 2019). Therefore, it is recommended assisting these groups more intensively by, for instance, investigating why relationships are not visiting, or if individuals lack social ties, connecting these individuals to other important social groups (such as community volunteers).

These efforts are made to help incarcerated individuals *build* a supportive social network. To ensure that individuals can maintain or build a network while incarcerated, visits need to be made accessible. The results of this dissertation suggest that one way to ensure that more individuals receive visits in prison would be to adopt flexible visitation policies. While all incarcerated adults have the legal right to one hour of visits per week in the Netherlands, the implementation of this right differs across prisons. While these differences may be subtle, still the results of this dissertation show that when flexible policies are adopted, such as allowing individuals to pick from several different time slots or having visiting hours in the weekends, the likelihood of receiving visits from diverse relationships increases. This is important as having multiple relationships to lean on for support can be beneficial for life after release and perhaps lessen the burden on partners and families of incarcerated individuals.

The 'Providing Opportunities for Reentry' act also aims to *strengthen* social connections to family and friends. This dissertation suggests that other measures are necessary for this since strengthening a relationship inherently requires frequent contact. To increase the number of visits individuals receive, the results of this dissertation are straightforward: place individuals closer to their social network. A closer proximity between individuals and their social network could be additionally beneficial for municipalities who strive to do system-oriented work during reintegration. Moreover, it is arguable that the current amount of visitation allowed in Dutch prisons may be too limited to be able to strengthen relationships

while incarcerated. Presently, individuals are allowed one hour of visits per week, with a maximum of two hours per week (which is only allowed for individuals in the plus program who may not be the ones for whom visits hold the most benefits). I recognize that this recommendation would require substantial changes to prison programming and logistics as visits are a complex event for prison staff. Yet, such changes are likely less expensive than what is required for other types of prison programming. Perhaps as an important start, correctional administrators could investigate popular visiting times and invest in expanding these. Being more efficient with the spaces and times available could make (frequent) visits more accessible. To do this most effectively, it would be beneficial to inquire about which times are most compatible for visitors' schedules. Also, investments in improving the visitation experience seem promising for increasing the frequency of visits.

Finally, a key part of this act is not necessarily building and strengthening *all* social connections but focusing on *supportive* ties. While the Dutch Prison Service has already taken steps to improve parent-child relationships and child visits, a general observation from this dissertation is that partners are important. Partners visit often and appear to visit despite practical challenges and an individual's criminal history. Partners also seem to be an important link in the social network as having a partner also increased the likelihood of receiving visits from children, family, and friends. In addition, partners seem to be less related to the 'harmful' effects of visits on misconduct. To promote these relationships, more awareness can be created for secondary stigmatization and providing support to protect against negative effects of imprisonment ('t Hoff-de Goede, 2018). Next to partners, this dissertation provides some suggestive evidence that frequent, regular visitors (which for some may not be a partner) may be supportive relationships. Since consistent visits were shown to be important for life after release, it seems useful to continue screening and monitoring whether and how often individuals receive visits throughout the entire prison term.

In line with the notion that not all social ties are necessarily supportive nor helpful, this dissertation showed that some relationships may increase risks of disciplinary infractions, especially the use of or possession of drugs. But, as not all visits are of equal risk, we caution implementing stricter security measures as a response to these findings. The visitation literature suggests that doing so may dampen the visitation experience (Arditti, 2003), which could lead some individuals to limit or stop receiving visits (Pleggenkuhle et al., 2018; Turanovic & Tasca, 2019), and – perhaps most importantly – visits under stricter conditions seem to be less beneficial for reducing recidivism (Turanovic & Tasca, 2021). One way of reducing

these risks, while also allowing for the maintenance and strengthening of social ties, is by providing video visits. At the start of this dissertation (2017), video visits were not common in Dutch prisons. When video visits were available, they were only allowed under specific circumstances (for instance, for incarcerated individuals who could not receive standard visits because their family lived in a foreign country). In 2020 as the global COVID-19 pandemic began and, as a result, prisons could not allow in-person visits, video visits became widely available. All Dutch prisons offered incarcerated individuals access to computers or tablets to “see” family and friends. Although video visits may not necessarily reduce security risks and institutional costs (Renaud, 2014), some recent U.S. studies do show benefits of using video visits as a supplement to in-prison visits (Brown et al., 2014; Murdoch & King, 2020; Tartaro & Levy, 2017). This warrants further empirical attention.

8.6 Conclusion

On a final note, although prison visitation has received increased scholarly attention, this research field is in a relatively early stage of development and many questions remain unanswered. To date, most accounts have advocated that prison visits can be beneficial. The present dissertation potentially reinforces them, but also shows that visitation is complex, especially in how it impacts life in prison. This dissertation provided insights into how visits can be facilitated, but it does not necessarily follow that merely increasing the number of visits or the number of individuals receiving visits can achieve the proposed benefits. Future research should be directed at even better understanding *why* visitation is influential to unpack its potential for managing correctional populations, lowering recidivism rates, and improving the well-being of persons affected by incarceration, even beyond the prison walls.

Table 8.1 Research Questions, Main Findings, and Policy Implications per Chapter

Chapter	Research question	Main findings	Policy recommendations
Part I. The Visitation Context	2	How is contact via prison visits regulated in Dutch law, policy, and practice? • Incarcerated adults have the right to one hour of standard visits per week • Since 2008 policy directives have expanded opportunities to receive visits • The form and amount of visitation is similar across prisons, but some prisons adopt more flexible policies	• Develop policies that stimulate the maintenance and strengthening of supportive relationships
	3	To what extent are social network characteristics and criminal history related to receiving visits in prison? • One-third of incarcerated adults are not visited in the past three months • Individuals with large, strong social networks prior to incarceration are most likely to receive visits in prison • Criminal history only affects visits from certain relationships • Individuals who have been incarcerated several times are less likely to receive visits from their child(ren) and family, but still receive visits from their partner	• Make an inventory of a person's pre-incarceration social network • Intensify efforts to improve access to social ties among 1) those who had limited contact prior to incarceration, 2) older individuals, 3) foreign nationals, 4) individuals serving short sentences
Part II. Determinants	4	To what extent are practical, relational, and experimental factors related to whether, how often, and from whom individuals receive visits in prison? • Whether an individual visits depends on their relationship to the incarcerated individual, but far travelling distances may still impede how often relationships come to visit • Providing more opportunities to receive visits increases the frequency of visits • Having positive visitation experiences is related to more frequent visits	• Place individuals close to their social network • Improve visit experiences • Investigate popular visiting times and adjust – where possible – visiting hours

Chapter	Research question	Main findings	Policy recommendations
Part III. Consequences	5 To what extent does receiving visits in prison relate to aggressive and contraband misconduct?	• Receiving visits, especially visits from partner and friends, is primarily related to an <i>increased</i> likelihood of (drug-related) contraband misconduct • Receiving visits, especially from friends, is related to lower likelihoods of (physically) aggressive misconduct, but weekly friend visits are related to higher likelihoods of aggressive misconduct (specifically destruction of property)	• Improving the visit experience could help lower incidences of physical aggression against others and objects • To minimize drug-related contraband, focus on who is visiting
	6 To what extent does the probability of misconduct change in the weeks surrounding a visit?	• An individuals' risk of infractions is comparable to average levels in anticipation of visits, increases up to 18% in the weeks immediately following visits, and then returns to baseline levels • This pattern is found for contraband infractions, but visits have little to no effects on aggressive infractions • Family and official visits have the strongest effects on infractions • When individuals are visited frequently, the risk of infractions postvisit is similar to average levels	• Use security measures cautiously as not all visits nor visitors are of equal risk • Help individuals maintain weekly visits
	7 To what extent do visitation patterns relate to individuals' post-release offending?	• Individuals who receive consistent, frequent visits are less likely to be reconvicted for all and serious offending within six months after release • Receiving an increase in visits in the months prior to release is also associated with short-term reductions in reconvictions • Receiving visits in prison seems important for life after release, even for individuals who had a strong social network prior to incarceration	• Investigate ways to allow frequent, consistent visitation • Increase efforts to encourage visits near release

