Complicated Connections: The Role of Risky and Supportive Relationships in Post-Incarceration Outcomes for Parents Returning to the Community

by

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A dissertation accepted and approved in partial fulfillment of the

requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

in Prevention Science

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Spring 2026

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DISSERTATION ABSTRACT

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Title: Complicated Connections: The Role of Risky and Supportive Relationships in Post-Incarceration Outcomes for Parents Returning to the Community

Reentry from incarceration unfolds within interdependent relationships that simultaneously provide supports, impose constraints, and contain risk. For parents returning to the community, close ties may supply essentials like housing, childcare, and emotional support while also embedding them in risk-related environments. Drawing on life-course theory and social capital frameworks (*i.e.,* Coleman, Lin, and Portes), this dissertation examines how ego-network composition and broader social circle characteristics predict post-release criminalized behavior and employment among parents at six months post-release.

This dissertation is a secondary analysis of data from a longitudinal RCT evaluating the effects of an in-prison parenting program, which includes 299 parents who completed a six-month follow-up interview (83.3% retention). Egocentric social network analysis was used to characterize participants' close networks and routine weekly social circles. Binary logistic regression models were estimated to assess associations between network predictors and post-release criminalized behavior and employment. A sequential modeling strategy first tested ego-network predictors alone (RQ1), then added social circle characteristics (RQ2).

Results partially supported the study hypotheses and revealed theoretically interpretable patterns. In full models adjusting for ego-network composition and controls, any risk-related exposure in the weekly social circle was the strongest predictor of post-release criminalized behavior (OR = 3.26, 95% CI [1.71, 6.22], $p < .001$). Greater family network size, however,

remained independently protective against criminalized behavior (OR = 0.74, 95% CI [0.59, 0.94], $p = .014$). Consistent with Coleman's (1988) emphasis on trust, obligation, and informal control within dense family networks, these findings suggest that family ties function as a social safety net during the high-risk early months of reentry, even when exposed to network member risk behavior in the broader social environment.

For employment, the findings reveal a more complicated picture. Having primarily pre-prison ties in one's weekly social circle was associated with markedly lower odds of post-release employment (OR = 0.22, 95% CI [0.10, 0.48], $p < .001$), whereas prosocial circle composition was associated with higher employment odds (OR = 1.42, 95% CI [1.01, 2.01], $p = .045$). These patterns illustrate the double-edged character of network embeddedness that Portes (1998) identified as negative social capital, where the same longstanding ties that offer stability and belonging during reentry may limit parents' reach into the new information and opportunity structures that employment requires. The prosocial composition finding aligns with Lin's (2001) argument that even modest exposure to prosocial contacts carries a detectable resource advantage.

These findings carry meaningful implications for reentry supervision policy and programming. Restrictive policies that broadly require severing relationships based on the assumption of risk exposure may dismantle the very relational infrastructure that protects against reoffending. They also suggest that reducing risk and supporting successful reentry may depend on different kinds of relational resources, indicating a need for approaches that consider both the protective role of close family ties and the potential for new prosocial connections to expand opportunities.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

As I reflect on the experiences that have brought me to this point in my education and career, I want to extend my deepest appreciation to my advisor and committee chair, Dr. Jean Kjellstrand. Jean took me on as a master's student six years ago and has stood by me through both my master's program and PhD. Your guidance at each stage has helped me tremendously. You made space for my ideas as they evolved and sometimes became more complicated. Thank you for the advice, mentorship, and modeling that helped me understand what it means to move through academic spaces with care and purpose. I will carry those lessons with me as I begin my next chapter as a professor.

I am also deeply grateful to my committee members, Dr. J. Mark Eddy, Dr. Ashley Linden-Carmichael, and Dr. Ryan Light. Mark, thank you for allowing me to use the Parent Child Study data and for your support of scholarship focused on families impacted by incarceration and reentry. Your work has created important opportunities to better understand and support system-impacted families, and I am honored to have contributed to that larger body of research. Ashley and Ryan, thank you for your thoughtful guidance, encouragement, and expertise throughout the dissertation process. Your feedback strengthened this project and helped me think more carefully about the theoretical, methodological, and practical contributions of this work.

I also want to express my gratitude to the faculty, staff, and graduate students in the Department of Counseling Psychology and Human Services and Prevention Science Institute, and especially to my fellow Prevention Science graduate students. The friendships, conversations, advocacy, and shared understanding within this community helped carry me through the many milestones of graduate school. I am also grateful to the faculty members whose guidance supported my growth throughout this program.

To my family and friends, thank you for loving me through this process, celebrating each step, no matter how small, and reminding me who I am outside of work and school. Your support helped me stay grounded through the challenges, uncertainty, and self-doubt that came with this season of life.

Finally, I want to thank my husband, Zach. Your love, patience, sacrifices, and belief in me carried me through. Having you by my side made the hard things more tolerable and the good things more exciting. Thank you for helping me carry the weight of this process by taking on so many of the day-to-day tasks that made my life easier. Most of all, thank you for reminding me that I can do this, and I am loved.

DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to system-impacted families, including my own. My family's experiences with mental health, substance use, and the legal system have shaped my connection to this work, while also reminding me that every family's story is unique. Having shared experiences with the communities my research is meant to serve carries tremendous weight. It reminds me that this scholarly work is personal, relational, and rooted in the realities families carry every day.

While these experiences are not all the same, they are connected by the difficult work of navigating systems, repairing relationships, and trying to create something more stable, safe, and sustainable. These struggles are personal as much as they are collective, and they shape the responsibility I feel in carrying this work forward. I dedicate this work to those who continue trying to reconnect, restore, and keep going despite the many barriers placed in their way. The perseverance required to continue caring for one another and moving forward under these conditions is profound. I am honored to contribute to this work with humility and hope.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Reentry into society following incarceration presents significant challenges for all individuals; however, these challenges are magnified for parents who have been incarcerated due to the interplay of emotional, social, and logistical factors affecting both themselves and their children (Raphael, 2011; Western & Smith, 2018). According to the most recent national prison survey prior to the pandemic, the Bureau of Justice Statistics estimated that approximately 684,500 state and federal prisoners were parents of at least one minor child in 2016 (Maruschak et al., 2021). Even more parents have experienced incarceration at some stage during their child's upbringing. In recent years, state and federal prison systems have released approximately 450,000 individuals annually, highlighting a critical area of concern in how to support families (Carson & Kluckow, 2023; Mueller & Kluckow, 2025). Social support has been found to be a consequential component in facilitating successful reintegration, providing access to essential resources such as housing, employment, and behavioral health care, while also addressing caretaking responsibilities (Liu et al., 2023). The strains of incarceration can jeopardize familial relationships, yet the quality and stability of these connections are vital for successful reentry (Hood & Gaston, 2022).

Extensive research has established links between parental incarceration and a heightened risk of caregiving instability, material hardship, and adverse health and developmental outcomes for children (Dworsky et al., 2011; Poehlman-Tynan & Turney, 2021; Schwartz-Soicher et al., 2011; Turney, 2014). Over 5 million children in the U.S. have a parent who is or has been imprisoned (Sykes & Pettit, 2014; Murphy & Cooper, 2015). The pervasive nature of parental incarceration, coupled with its potential detrimental impact on children, underscores the urgent

need to explore points of intervention that can mitigate these effects and prevent intergenerational harm. By examining the role of social networks, this dissertation contributes to understanding how social conditions shape parental reentry, with broader implications for system-impacted families.

Background and Significance

Reentry refers to the transition from incarceration back into the community and the longer process of reestablishing a stable, prosocial life after release. In particular, the transition is shaped by prior incarceration experiences and overlapping demands post-release, such as complying with supervision conditions, securing basic needs, reconnecting with family, and managing health and behavioral health concerns, often under conditions of heightened instability. Material insecurity is especially central as formerly incarcerated people frequently struggle to meet basic needs and attain economic security in the months and years following release (Harding et al., 2014). Reentry hardships are often intensified by collateral consequences, such as the formal and informal restrictions that follow a criminal legal record, as well as service gaps, including unmet health needs, raising ethical and public health concerns for reentry reform (Mears & Cochran, 2012). The reentry process is structurally patterned by macro-level inequities, with poverty and structural racism concentrating incarceration risks and post-release burdens in Black communities and other communities of color (Halushka, 2020; Hinton et al., 2018). This concentration translates into reduced access to employment and housing, greater exposure to surveillance, and cumulative disadvantage post-release, thereby shaping the opportunities and constraints faced during reentry.

Recidivism

Recidivism is commonly used as a distal measure to operationalize "reentry success" in criminal justice research and policy. Conceptually, recidivism is a relapse in behavior; however, it is not a single, uniform construct. Studies may define it as rearrest, reincarceration, conviction, or even self-reported offending, and they apply different follow-up windows that can change both prevalence estimates and interpretations (Sawyer & Wagner, 2020). In U.S. corrections research, one of the most common benchmarks is rearrest within three years of prison release (Alper et al., 2018). In a large Bureau of Justice Statistics study that tracked individuals released from state prisons in 2005 for nine years (2005–2014), 83% were rearrested at least once during the follow-up period (Alper et al., 2018).

Substance use is a central mechanism linking reentry conditions to recidivism risk, particularly in the early months after release. An estimated 75% of formerly incarcerated individuals have a history of a substance use disorder (Travis et al., 2001). Using substances illegally or legally during reentry may lead to rearrest and reincarceration by increasing exposure to behaviors and circumstances that generate justice contact (*e.g.,* impaired decision-making leading to conflict, drug-related charges, or supervision violations). Return to use can also increase vulnerability to supervision-related sanctions, which can result in reincarceration, even when no new serious offense is present. Substance use treatment is often associated with moderate reductions in recidivism risk among justice-involved populations (Mitchell et al., 2012; Visher et al., 2017).

Family relationships and peer contexts shape these behavioral health pathways in ways that help explain why the presence of "support" does not consistently translate into improved outcomes. While the reentry literature identifies family support as potentially protective, findings

are mixed regarding the magnitude of effects for positive family support and are more consistent for negative relational dynamics. For example, Mowen and Visher (2015) reported that family conflict predicted increased post-release substance use (excluding alcohol), while positive family support was not a significant predictor. Boman and Mowen (2017) found that family support was protective against substance use among individuals at high risk for reoffending, yet higher peer criminality significantly increased the likelihood of post-release substance use even in the presence of family support. These findings suggest that conflictual family dynamics and exposure to criminally involved peers may be more influential for return to use risk than the mere presence of supportive relationships.

The "Cut Ties" Narrative and Caregiving Considerations for Reentering Parents

Similar to drug court standards established in the 1990s, probation and parole conditions across U.S. jurisdictions commonly restrict associations with other system-involved individuals, effectively encouraging changes in social environments ("people, places, and things") to reduce exposure to criminogenic influences and lower recidivism risk (National Association of Drug Court Professionals, 1997; Binnall, 2019). A recent Prison Policy Initiative review of association restrictions documents how these conditions can prohibit people on supervision from communicating, living, working, or socializing with people who have criminal records, are currently incarcerated, or are also under supervision, even when those relationships provide meaningful reentry support (Wang, 2023). These restrictions can therefore complicate access to housing, employment, transportation, treatment, and family support, while increasing the risk of technical violations for ordinary or supportive interactions (Wang, 2023). Moreover, association restrictions are not always applied uniformly. What constitutes a prohibited "association" may be subject to officer, judicial, or jurisdictional discretion, making the consequences of maintaining

system-involved ties difficult to anticipate. For reentering parents, this discretion is particularly important because relationships with co-parents, relatives, romantic partners, or close friends may be both restricted and necessary for caregiving, housing, transportation, and emotional support. Depending on the conditions of supervision and the intensity of surveillance, continued contact with these ties may increase the risk of technical violations and, in some cases, reincarceration.

At the same time, reentering individuals are advised to distance themselves from earlier potentially risky associations; they are also prompted to cultivate new connections with prosocial peers and engage in constructive, community-based activities (American Probation and Parole Association, 2024). Many describe the importance of achieving what can be likened to a "fresh start," often involving identity change and recognition by others as they move toward a prosocial life (Maruna & LeBel, 2010; Laub & Sampson, 2001). However, implementing these changes presents both emotional and practical challenges, including the reality that "risky people and places" may overlap with essential support needs such as housing and—especially for parents—childcare and co-parenting support (Arditti & Few, 2006; Binnall, 2019; Wang, 2023). Caregiving responsibilities are central to how the "cut ties" narrative is more complex for parents than for other reentering adults. Parents return to a variety of custodial statuses, including primary custodial parents; others have shared or alternating custody; many have reduced or supervised parenting time; and some are non-custodial with contact through in-person or remote visits (Arditti, 2005; Shlafer et al., 2023). These caregiving configurations determine which relationships parents can realistically change.

Supporting Corrections-Involved Families. Corrections-based parenting interventions aim to address the harms of parental incarceration on families by strengthening parenting

knowledge, parenting skills, and positive family connection (Eddy et al., 2008). Parenting Inside Out (PIO) is one example of this approach and was developed on the premise that parenting and family relationships are central to incarcerated parents' adjustment during imprisonment and after release. In addition to strengthening parenting knowledge and skills, PIO was designed to support healthier parent-caregiver relationships and family interaction in preparation for reentry. Findings from the trial showed proximal benefits in parenting, parent adjustment, and parent-caregiver relationships during incarceration (Eddy et al., 2013). Later post-release analyses also found that participants assigned to PIO reported fewer substance-use-related problems and less criminal behavior after release (Eddy et al., 2022).

Prior PIO research also suggests that parenting context varies meaningfully even within samples made up entirely of incarcerated parents. Burraston and Eddy (2017) found that living with a child before incarceration moderated post-release arrest outcomes in the PIO trial. Parents in the control condition who had lived with their child before incarceration had fewer post-release arrests than those who had not, whereas arrest levels in the PIO condition differed little by prior co-residence. These findings suggest that caregiving context prior to incarceration may shape reentry trajectories and reinforce the importance of treating parenting as a meaningful social context for research and intervention.

Differences Between Mothers and Fathers. The literature on parental incarceration documents divergent pathways for mothers and fathers, reflecting gendered caregiving roles that shape parenting identities and conditions for family reintegration (Arditti, 2005; Western & Smith, 2018). For mothers, reentry is marked by interrelated challenges that center on regaining caregiving roles amid custody pressures, child welfare scrutiny, and limited resources, often compounded by housing instability and employment barriers (Arditti & Few, 2006; Brown &

Bloom, 2009; Michalsen, 2019). Qualitative studies highlight that mothers face stigma and expectations of "good motherhood," along with emotional distress that affects parenting capacity and service engagement (Easterling et al., 2019; Arditti & Few, 2008). In contrast, fathers focus on rebuilding father–child relationships while navigating provider expectations and employment barriers due to criminal records (Charles et al., 2021). Fatherhood serves both as a motivation for desistance and a strain under economic and housing pressures (Laird et al., 2020). Family dynamics and coparenting quality are crucial for fathers' reintegration and children's adjustment, emphasizing the role of relational stability and coordinated support in successful reunification (Muentner & Charles, 2023).

Social Support

Social support is defined as the perceived or actual assistance provided by formal or informal social networks (*e.g.,* family, caseworkers, community groups, friends, or colleagues; Cullen, 1994). Support from family has been identified as a particularly important source of social support post-release, as it has been indirectly linked to a decrease in recidivism (Boman & Mowen, 2017; Visher & Courtney, 2007). Early definitions of social support describe two types of support, expressive and instrumental support (Cullen, 1994). Expressive support tends to the more emotional aspects of support, such as having someone to vent to or confide in. Instrumental support may include someone to provide financial assistance, shelter, or advice. Colvin et al. (2002) posit that consistent access to social support facilitates feelings of trust between the provider and recipient, which can help the recipient desist from criminal activity.

More recent research has added to the types of social supports formerly incarcerated individuals report receiving or hope to receive during reentry (*e.g.,* Kjellstrand et al., 2023; Mowen et al., 2019). Using an orthogonal varimax rotated factor analysis, Mowen et al. (2019)

identified the three distinct types of social support that are primarily provided by family members but can also be received through other sources.

- **Emotional Support:** the extent to which individuals feel close to family and friends.
- **Interactional Support**: the extent to which individuals believe they can rely on family and friends to talk about problems and express understanding.
- **Instrumental Support**: the extent to which the individual feels they can rely on family or friends to help meet their basic needs.

The findings from this study indicated that instrumental support was associated with a reduced likelihood of reincarceration, substance use, and re-offending. In contrast, emotional and interactional support did not show a similar relationship. While much of reentry research concentrates on desistance from behaviors that contribute to illegal activities, it is important to recognize other outcomes indicative of well-being, which are vital to the health of the family context, where emotional support and interaction may have more influence.

For example, Kjellstrand et al. (2023) expanded on these categories further through qualitative interviews with formerly incarcerated individuals. They added that the participants in their study highly valued secondary sources of support, such as formal or informal mentors and reentry services. Peer mentoring programs were found to be particularly effective for emotional support, as talking with someone with a similar lived experience can help one feel understood and cared for (Kjellstrand et al., 2023). Moreover, participants described how the absence of the varying types of social support and the nature in which they were provided had impacted their well-being. The addition of a prosocial anchor like a mentor or recovery coach who regularly

interacts with the parent and child caregiving network could be a feasible alternative to completely severing relationships.

Housing

Access to stable housing is an essential protective factor against recidivism (Lutze et al., 2014). Having a reliable place to live provides individuals with the stability to seek and maintain employment, participate in treatment, and comply with post-release restrictions. Formerly incarcerated individuals often struggle to find reliable living arrangements upon release from jail or prison due to the biases and legal policies attached to incarceration, along with restricted government resources (Keene et al., 2017). Barriers to stable housing may be greater for women than men due to safety concerns and their potential caregiving responsibilities, especially for women who have experienced domestic violence (Smoyer et el., 2021). Formerly incarcerated individuals unable to secure independent housing often rely on family or friends to provide shelter or otherwise be unhoused (Roman & Travis, 2006).

Although family and friends may wish to provide support, they may be unable to do so due to their own living situations. For example, if they live in a rental property or subsidized housing or have a criminal history themselves, rental agreements and legal policies may restrict them from allowing someone with a criminal history to live at the property (Keene et al., 2018). In some cases, formerly incarcerated individuals may have family or friends who are unable or unwilling to house them due to a lack of resources (*e.g.,* financial, emotional) to care for them (Western et al., 2015). Depending on the circumstances, family and friends may feel they have exhausted the support they can provide (Hood & Gaston, 2019).

Employment

Post-release employment often depends on references, childcare, and reliable transportation, showing how resources and stigma collide for parents. Employment is one of the most critical barriers faced during reentry, as it directly affects an individual's livelihood (Raphael, 2011). Recently released individuals are often legally required to find employment, as a mandate of their parole or probation, to pay off debt incurred through involvement in the justice system, or to work off child support payments (Augustine, 2019). Consistent with prior research, Duwe and Clark (2017) found that pre-prison employment was one of the strongest predictors of post-release employment outcomes, suggesting that labor-market attachment before incarceration continues to shape employment prospects after release. However, due to their criminal record and incarceration, an individual's employment opportunities are significantly reduced. Not only has their employment record been interrupted, but their subsequent felony record diminishes employers' trust and, in some occupations, creates a legal inability to hire the individual due to the nature of the offense (Raphael, 2011).

Low educational attainment, paired with a felony conviction, may make obtaining gainful employment relatively impossible for some individuals (Augustine, 2019). An estimated 54-70% of individuals returning to the community have not completed a high school degree (Raphael, 2011; Fella & Gallipoli, 2014). Like many job seekers, formerly incarcerated individuals may rely on their social capital to connect them with employment opportunities. Prosocial connections and emotional and instrumental supports from family and friends may provide critical assistance for previously incarcerated individuals and increase their likelihood of gaining employment, which in turn assists in successful reentry.

Due to the nature of their conviction or the time spent incarcerated, individuals with criminal histories likely have diminished social networks and resources. However, Berg & Huebner (2011) theorize the potential of a reciprocal relationship between familial support and prosocial activities in which being employed or pursuing educational opportunities can positively impact the family's perception of the previously incarcerated individual, leading to increased support. For parents, employment logistics are inseparable from childcare and custody schedules; "cutting ties" with relatives labeled risky may sever the very childcare that makes shift work or job training possible.

Theoretical foundations

Life-Course

A life-course "linked lives" lens emphasizes that reentry unfolds within interdependent relationships (*i.e.,* ties), such that individual trajectories are shaped by the roles, responsibilities, and resources of significant others (Elder, 1998). Early months post-release constitute a sensitive transition period in which parents' networks may change rapidly through co-residence, reunification, service engagement, and shifts in contact with pre-incarceration peers. During this period, the presence (or absence) of specific ties, the roles those ties occupy (*e.g.,* partners, caregivers, children, friends), and the functions they provide (*e.g.,* emotional support, practical assistance, education, accountability, connections) jointly shape parents' resources and constraints, with implications for both immediate stability and longer-term desistance and family functioning.

Social Capital and Social Network Analysis

Social support is a central focus of reentry research. Studies consistently show that maintaining supportive relationships, particularly with family, is associated with improved

reentry outcomes, including employment and recidivism (*e.g.,* Berg & Huebner, 2011; Mowen et al., 2019). While social support research clarifies how relationships function in day-to-day life, social capital theory provides a framework for understanding how relationships shape access to resources and opportunities during reentry (Erices-Ocampo et al., 2025). Across theoretical approaches, scholars differ in whether social capital is treated primarily as (a) the supportive functions that occur within close, cohesive networks or (b) access to valued resources embedded in network structures and social positions (Erices-Ocampo et al., 2025). This conceptual diversity has contributed to applied work in criminology and public health, sometimes using social support measures as proxies for social capital, even though these concepts capture distinct dimensions of social life. To align theory with measurement in social network analysis (SNA), this study draws on two social capital perspectives (*i.e.,* Coleman, 1988, 1990, and Lin, 1999, 2001) that correspond to parents' social environments during reentry.

Key Social Network Analysis Features. SNA provides a methodological bridge between social support and social capital frameworks by allowing researchers to distinguish perceptions of support from structural features of personal networks, and by treating social support as one indicator within broader network-based conceptualizations of social capital (Kadushin, 2012, pp. 168–177). This perspective is useful in reentry research because it can differentiate between supportive assistance currently exchanged through relationships and social capital conceptualized as access to network-embedded resources that may facilitate reintegration (Cullen, 1994; Lin, 2001). In egocentric SNA, the focal participant (*i.e.,* the person interviewed) is the "ego" (Kadushin, 2012). Researchers typically use structured prompts called name generators to elicit names of people in the personal network of the ego. The people the participants name are called "alters". For each alter, the participant responds to name-interpreter

items describing relationship characteristics. In this study, network members are elicited using a household roster (*i.e.,* "people you are living with…full-time and part-time") and an importance-based name generator (*i.e.,* "people who are most important to you who do not live with you"), producing an ego network that captures who is in the parent's close relational environment and how those relationships are experienced (*e.g.,* relationship type, perceived support, emotional closeness).

Network theory also highlights that various kinds of ties may confer different forms of advantage. Putnam (2000) distinguishes between bonding social capital (*i.e.,* ties that reinforce support and solidarity within close networks) and bridging social capital (*i.e.,* ties that connect people to new social spaces and resources). Granovetter's (1973) "strength of weak ties" argument similarly emphasizes that contacts can serve as bridges to information and opportunities (*e.g.,* job leads). For corrections-involved parents, bonding connections (*e.g.,* family and close friends) may be essential for immediate survival needs and parenting logistics, yet these same ties may also involve risk exposure or strain (*e.g.,* active substance use in the household, illegal activities, or conflict that disrupts stability). Bridging connections (*e.g.,* employed peers, mentors, service providers) may expand access to conventional roles and institutional resources but may be difficult to establish quickly after release due to stigma, restricted mobility, and the demands of family reunification.

Reentry approaches that emphasize tie severance and rapid replacement of "risky" ties can overstate the feasibility of bridging while underappreciating that parents often cannot disengage from essential kin-based networks that provide housing, childcare, and day-to-day support. Especially in early reentry periods, bonding ties may be the most immediately instrumental form of capital because they are accessible and structure caregiving responsibilities.

This study, therefore, treats the key question not as whether parents can or should "cut ties," but which aspects of their relational environments are most consequential for early reentry outcomes.

A Dual Perspective of Social Capital for Reentry. This study conceptualizes social capital as a multi-mechanism resource for reintegration that varies in both its structure (*i.e.,* close ties vs broader opportunity structures) and its function (stability vs. mobility). Integrating Coleman's (1988, 1990) emphasis on social capital generated through trust, obligations, norms, and informal control with Lin's (1999, 2001) social resource focus clarifies why both core-tie measures and broader measures of routine social exposure are needed. In this framing, Coleman helps explain the "safety net" that supports basic needs and social control, whereas Lin helps explain the "ladder" that supports access to opportunities like gainful employment.

Coleman: the "safety net". First, Coleman's conception of social capital emphasizes processes within close, interdependent networks, including trust, obligations, information channels, and norms, supported by social closure, that facilitate coordination and reliable support (Coleman, 1988, 1990). These dynamics are particularly relevant for relationships that dominate much of the reentry literature, such as family members and close friends who often serve as primary sources of caregiving help and emotional support (*e.g.,* Berg & Huebner, 2011; Mowen et al., 2019). Conceptually, this emphasis maps onto what a personal network approach would treat as a parent's highly salient, frequently contacted ties embedded in everyday caregiving logistics. Research shows that individuals with corrections-related backgrounds primarily have networks consisting of family and romantic partners. However, a subset of these individuals face particularly harmful influences within their core networks (Bellair et al., 2019). Additionally, these close, interdependent relationships can amplify conflicts, contributing to negative outcomes upon reentry into society (Mowen & Visher, 2015). Consistent with this perspective, I use ego-

network measures derived from the household roster and an importance-based name generator, paired with perceived support, perceived emotional closeness, and continuity of pre-prison ties, to operationalize closed processes within parents' core relational environments.

Lin: the "ladder". Second, Lin's theory conceptualizes social capital as resources embedded in social networks that can be accessed and mobilized through social ties to support purposive action and generate returns (Lin, 1999, 2001). Lin's framework emphasizes the broader opportunity structure that influences individuals, particularly how network connections affect access to instrumental resources and pathways to employment, housing stability, and service systems. This perspective is especially relevant when examining reentry issues among disadvantaged and stigmatized groups (Erices-Ocampo et al., 2025). Furthermore, relevant opportunities and constraints may extend beyond an emotionally close core and may be distributed across broader sets of regular contacts (see Goodson-Miller, 2022). Accordingly, the present study pairs ego-network measures of close ties with a weekly social circle measure that captures the broader composition of parents' routine social environments. Resource content of that routine environment is operationalized through composition indicators that capture exposure to prosocial roles (*e.g.,* employment/education) and risk-related behaviors (*e.g.,* illegal activity).

Lin's framework often motivates measuring tie-specific resource exchanges (*e.g.,* whether a particular contact provides job leads, housing access, or service connections), but these tie-level resource transfer measures are not available in the present dataset. Accordingly, I do not link individual alters to specific employment- or housing-related assistance. Instead, I operationalize relevant processes at the contextual level by assessing the risk–protection profile of parents' routine social environments—captured by the size and composition of the weekly social circle, including risk and prosocial composition and continuity of pre-prison ties. This

approach captures the extent to which parents are embedded in opportunity-rich versus risk-saturated contexts that may shape reentry trajectories through everyday norms, routines, and access to informal and formal opportunities, even when specific pathways of resource transfer cannot be attributed to individual ties. As such, Granovetter's and Putnam's frameworks remain useful for interpretation, as they motivate attention to bridging processes and inform my interpretation of the continuity of the pre-prison ties item as an indicator of stability versus change in routine contacts, and of the opportunity/risk profile of parents' weekly social environments.

Negative Social Capital in a Dual-Perspective Framework. Although social capital is often discussed as a beneficial resource, it can also have detrimental consequences. Portes (1998) argues that social ties may generate resources and support, but they can also create obligations, restrict individual autonomy, reinforce exclusionary norms, or limit social mobility. In this sense, the "negative side" of social capital does not refer to social isolation or a lack of connection. Rather, it describes situations in which relationships provide belonging and short-term stability while also creating constraints that may undermine longer-term well-being or opportunity. For corrections-involved parents, this tension is especially important as close and supportive relationships may serve as a critical safety net during reentry by providing housing, childcare, emotional support, transportation, and other forms of day-to-day assistance and at the same time, may keep parents that increase exposure to substance use, criminalized activity, surveillance, or interpersonal conflict, or create obligations that make it harder to relocate, accept employment with inflexible hours, or distance themselves from risky contexts.

Conceptual Framework

In this study, social support refers to the emotional and practical help available through relationships, whereas social capital refers to the extent to which relationships can be leveraged into valued resources, opportunities, and longer-term stability. Thus, social support may help parents manage the immediate demands of reentry, while social capital may help them move beyond short-term survival toward employment and broader upward mobility. Recognizing the possibility of negative social capital is therefore important for understanding why strong social support does not always translate into positive reentry outcomes and why recommendations to "cut ties" may be unrealistic or counterproductive for parents whose caregiving responsibilities are deeply embedded in existing relationships. The following examples illustrate how social support and social capital can work together during the reentry process, accompanied by a visual conceptual representation in Figure 1.

A. **High Support / Low Capital**: Close, supportive relationships that provide care and day-to-day help but limited access to new opportunities or material advancement.

   Example: A loving family network offers encouragement, childcare, and emotional support, but most members are also experiencing financial strain, unstable employment, or limited connection to institutions that could help.

B. **High Support / High Capital:** Close, supportive relationships that are also "prosocial" (*e.g.,* stably employed, reputable character, connected to other "prosocial" community members), which help connect the parent to valued resources and opportunities.

   Example: A caring sister provides childcare and emotional support, while a mentor or relative connects the parent to a job lead, a housing contact, or access to services.

C. **Low Support / Low Capital:** Relationships that provide neither dependable support nor meaningful access to resources or opportunities.

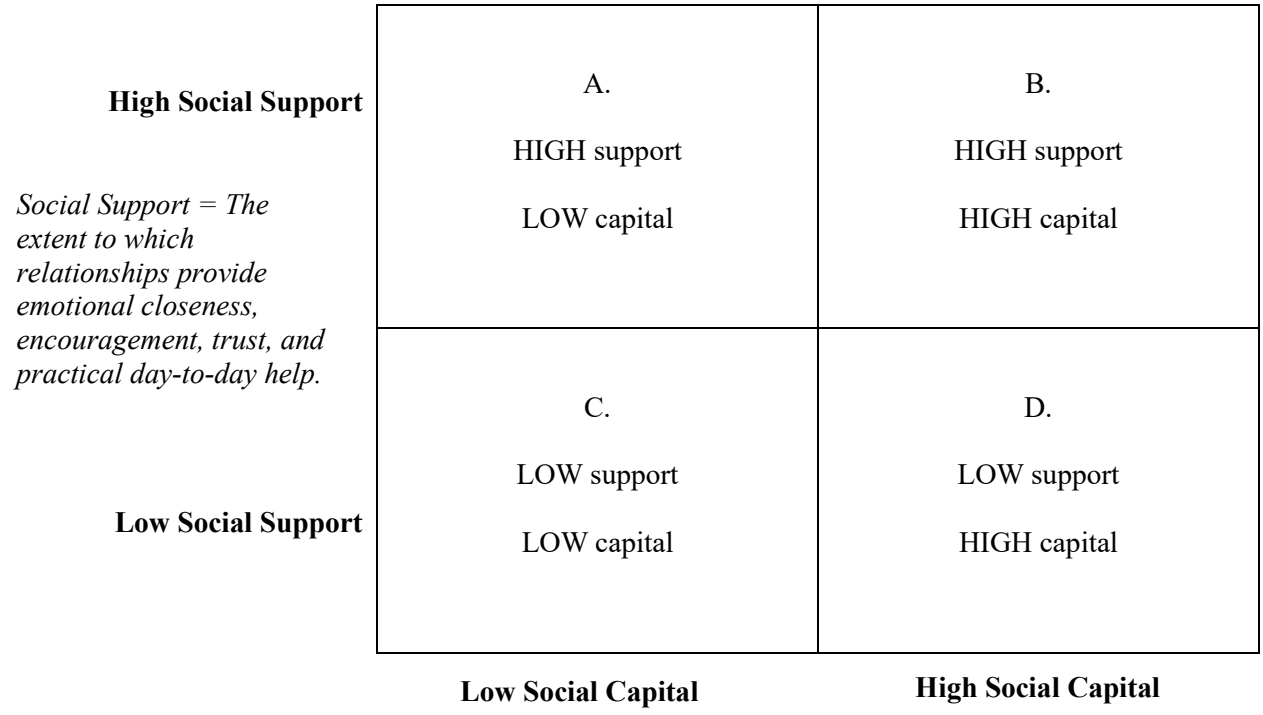
   Example: Isolation, unstable ties, or strained relationships that do not offer consistent care, guidance, or pathways to stability.

D. **Low Support / High Capital**: Less emotionally close relationships that still provide useful information, referrals, or opportunities.

   Example: A program staff member, former employer, or alumni contact is not personally close but can connect the parent to training, housing referrals, or jobs.

Figure 1

Conceptual Matrix of Social Support and Social Capital during Reentry



Note. This matrix is a conceptual illustration of how social support and social capital may combine in the reentry experiences of corrections-involved parents.

The Present Study

Gaps in the Literature

The current study addresses several related gaps in the literature. First, much of the reentry literature does not focus specifically on corrections-involved parents, even though parenting may shape reentry through caregiving demands, co-parenting relationships, custody arrangements, child access, and family reunification. Second, although prior research often highlights the importance of social support, relatively little work has examined the specific social networks surrounding parents during reentry, including the structure, quality, and composition of

those relationships. Third, literature often blurs the distinction between social support and social capital, leaving unclear how supportive ties, broader social environments, and access to network-based resources may operate differently during reentry. Finally, this study builds on prior PIO intervention research by shifting attention away from intervention effects alone and toward the broader social and caregiving context of early reentry, using an egocentric social network approach to better understand the relationships surrounding corrections-involved parents.

Purpose

The purpose of this study is to examine how corrections-involved parents' social relationships during the first six months post-release are associated with key reentry outcomes. Guided by linked lives and complementary social capital perspectives, the study distinguishes between two overlapping but analytically distinct social contexts. First, the study examines parents' ego networks, defined as the set of individually named household members and most important non-household ties identified at the six-month interview. This network captures the parent's immediate relational context, including who is in the close network, the family content of that network and perceived support. Second, the study examines a broader weekly social circle, defined as the set of people the parent spends time with at least weekly since release. This module captures routine social exposure, including weekly social circle size, continuity of pre-prison ties, and the risk and prosocial composition of the broader social environment. When used together, these two lenses allow the study to test whether the size and family content of parents' close ego networks are associated with housing stability, employment, and criminalized behavior at six months post-release, and whether broader weekly social exposure contributes additional explanatory value, particularly for outcomes more likely to depend on routine social opportunity structures such as employment and criminalized behavior.

Research Questions and Hypotheses

RQ1: How are ego-network family and non-family count and social support associated with housing stability, employment, and criminalized behavior at six months post-release among corrections-involved parents?

H1a (housing): A greater ego-network number of family and non-family ties and more support will be associated with higher odds of housing stability at six months.

H1b (employment): Ego-network family and non-family count, and social support will show little to no association with employment at six months.

H1c (criminalized behavior): A greater ego-network number of family and non-family ties, and social support will be associated with lower odds of criminalized behavior by six months.

RQ2: Do weekly social circle characteristics, including size, continuity of pre-prison ties, risk composition, and prosocial composition, predict housing stability, employment, and criminalized behavior after adjusting for ego-network variables and covariates?

H2a (housing): Weekly social circle characteristics will show little to no association with housing stability after adjusting for the ego-network and covariates.

H2b (employment): A more prosocial weekly social circle will be associated with higher odds of employment, whereas greater weekly social circle risk composition will be associated with lower odds of employment, after adjusting for the ego-network and covariates.

H2c (criminalized behavior): Greater weekly social circle risk composition will be associated with higher odds of criminalized behavior, whereas a more prosocial weekly

social circle will be associated with lower odds of criminalized behavior, after adjusting for the ego-network and covariates.

By centering the caregiving context, this study advances a more nuanced understanding of how social ties function during reentry. Rather than reinforcing a simplistic "cut ties" narrative, it examines how network resources and exposures may operate differently across close and broader social contexts. In doing so, the study highlights how parents' relationships may be stabilizing, neutral, or destabilizing in ways that are shaped by both immediate close ties and routine social environments. Such information can help guide reentry programming that meets parents' needs.

CHAPTER II

METHOD

Study Design

The current study is a secondary data analysis of the Parent Child Study (PCS). It uses egocentric social network analysis of parents' networks assessed approximately six months post-release. Network features are derived from a self-report quantitative interview that includes a name generator and accompanying name interpreter items. These network characteristics are then linked to key reentry outcomes.

Parent Child Study Overview

The PCS was a randomized controlled trial (RCT) evaluating the Parenting Inside Out (PIO, Schiffmann et al., 2008) parent management training program for incarcerated mothers and fathers. The trial compared outcomes for parents assigned to the PIO versus a services-as-usual control condition and was conducted in collaboration with the Oregon Department of Corrections (DOC) and Pathfinders of Oregon, a nonprofit organization that provides programming within state prisons. PIO is a group-based parent management training program adapted specifically for incarcerated parents. It was designed to increase parents' motivation, knowledge, and skills related to preventing antisocial and other problem behaviors in their children (Eddy et al., 2008; Eddy et al., 2010). The current dissertation does not re-evaluate the impact of PIO; instead, it draws on PCS follow-up data to examine parents' social networks and reentry outcomes.

Setting and Procedures

Incarcerated parents were recruited from all 14 Oregon DOC facilities. The PCS was implemented in four minimum or medium-security releasing institutions (three men's and one women's prison) where individuals were typically housed prior to release. Interested incarcerated

persons contacted the study team, were screened for eligibility, and, when necessary and feasible, were transferred to a participating institution. To promote demographic diversity, women and racial/ethnic minority parents were oversampled.

Participants were individually randomized to PIO or services-as-usual, with randomization blocked by sex and race/ethnicity, and conducted within institution-based cohorts. Parents were interviewed at multiple time points: pre-intervention (in prison), post-intervention (in prison), and at 6 months and 12 months after release (with a subset also interviewed one month post-release). All interviews were conducted in person by trained staff due to variation in literacy levels of the participants. Procedures were approved by the federal Office for Human Research Protections and the Oregon Social Learning Center Institutional Review Board.

In the intervention condition, participants received PIO in small groups that met several times per week over approximately 12 weeks. Sessions included structured content on parenting skills, communication, and parenting during incarceration, with opportunities for discussion and practice. Participants in the control condition did not receive PIO but had access to other parenting programs and services routinely available in their institution. Because the present analysis focuses on social networks and reentry outcomes at six months post-release, details of program implementation and fidelity monitoring are not described here (see Eddy et al., 2013; Eddy et al., 2022).

Eligibility and Recruitment

To be eligible for PCS, incarcerated adults were required to:

1. Have at least one minor child, with a focal child between 3 and 11 years old;
2. Have the legal right to contact the child;
3. Have had a parenting role in the past and expect to have such a role in the future;

4. Be able to provide contact information for the child's current caregiver;
5. Have no history of a crime against a child or sex offense;
6. Have fewer than nine months remaining on their prison sentence; and
7. Be eligible for transfer to a participating institution according to DOC policies.

The study was advertised throughout the DOC via institutional newspapers, posters, announcements, and informational meetings. Over a three-year recruitment period, 1,483 incarcerated parents expressed interest and were screened; 453 met all eligibility criteria, and approximately 80% of those eligible consented. Participation was high for both mothers and fathers, but was higher among women than men. The most common reasons for ineligibility were not having minor children and having a release date more than nine months away.

Participants

The PCS enrolled 359 incarcerated parents, including 161 men (45%) and 198 women (55%). The sample was racially and ethnically diverse relative to the Oregon DOC population, with a majority identifying as White and substantial representation of African American, multiracial, Native American, and Latino parents. Educational attainment was generally low, and most participants reported histories of substance use problems and other psychosocial risks.

On average, parents had approximately three children, and the focal child selected for the study was about 8 years old. Prior to incarceration, roughly one-third of parents had lived full-time with their children, with others having part-time or intermittent contact. Intervention and control groups were comparable on key baseline characteristics, indicating that randomization produced balanced groups.

Assessment Procedures Relevant to the Current Study

Interviews incorporated a combination of standardized instruments, measures previously utilized with similar populations, and study-specific items. At each wave of the study, parents identified a focal minor child, and both child- and caregiver-related questions centered around that child and their current caregiver. While the PCS gathered data from both caregivers and children, this dissertation focuses exclusively on data collected from parents.

The current study centers on data from the six-month post-release assessment, which encompassed the social network name generator and measures of reentry outcomes. At this follow-up, interviews were conducted either in the community or in correctional settings, based on the parents' post-release circumstances. Participants received $30 compensation for each completed interview.

The emphasis on the six-month post-release follow-up is based on three key considerations. First, this time point allowed for the administration of the full ego social network module, which included detailed inquiries regarding both household and non-household contacts, levels of support, closeness, and involvement with illegal or substance use behaviors. Second, the six-month mark captures the later portion of the highest-risk early post-release period, as nearly 30% of released people are rearrested within the first six months (Travis et al., 2012). At this time point, parents have had the opportunity to reestablish community-based networks and living arrangements, yet are likely still navigating considerable instability in housing, employment, substance use, and family roles. Lastly, attrition tends to be less pronounced at six months compared to later follow-ups, resulting in a larger and less selected sample than would be available at the twelve-month point. For these reasons, network characteristics and reentry outcomes at the six-month post-release stage serve as the primary focus of the current analyses.

Analytic Sample

The present study draws on PCS parent data collected at the six-month post-release follow-up. The analytic sample includes parents who (a) were enrolled in PCS at baseline, (b) were released from prison, and (c) completed the six-month post-release interview. Based on these criteria, the analytic sample consists of 299 parents, representing 83.3% of the 359 parents originally enrolled in PCS (60 lost to follow-up).

To assess potential selection bias due to attrition, retained and lost-to-follow-up participants were compared on key baseline characteristics, including gender, race/ethnicity, intervention group assignment, pre-incarceration employment, age, sentence length, and education level. Retained participants were significantly more likely to be female ($p = .003$); all other comparisons were non-significant. The higher retention rate among women is partially attributable to the original sampling design, which oversampled mothers at baseline, and is considered when interpreting any gender-related patterns in the findings. Because gender is fully observed in the analytic sample, missingness explained by gender satisfies the Missing at Random (MAR) assumption, thereby supporting the use of multiple imputations for item-level missing data within the analytic sample as described in the Analytic Strategy section.

Sample Characteristics. At six months post-release, the PCS follow-up sample included 299 parents (59% mothers, $n = 176$; 41% fathers, $n = 123$). Parents ranged in age from 19 to 51 years ($M = 32.02$, $SD = 6.68$). The majority identified White (59%), with additional representation from Black (12%), Latinx (8%), Indigenous (8%), and multiracial or other racial groups (13%). These distributions reflect the oversampling strategies used in PCS, which produced a sample that is more gender and racially diverse than the Oregon DOC population overall.

In terms of socioeconomic indicators, about 65% of participants (n = 194) had at least a high school diploma or GED, and 60% (n = 181) were employed in the year prior to incarceration. Parents had, on average, three children (SD = 2.46). The focal child was approximately 8 years old (M = 8.00, SD = 2.82), with equal representation of girls (50%; n = 150) and boys (50%; n = 149). Like their parents, most focal children were White (56%), with additional representation from Black (10%), Latinx (8%), Indigenous (4%), and multiracial or other groups (23%).

Just under half of focal children were living with their incarcerated parent in the six months prior to the parent's incarceration, though children and parents had lived together for an average of about four years cumulatively before the incarceration. Parents' prison sentences averaged just under two years (M = 1.78, SD = 1.61). Among those interviewed at the six-month follow-up, 55% (n = 166) had been randomized to receive PIO, and 45% were assigned to services-as-usual. Participants were drawn from four releasing institutions (three men's and one women's facility), with the women's prison accounting for the largest share of the sample.

Measures

Egocentric Network Predictors

Egocentric networks are defined around each focal parent (*i.e.,* the "ego"). Alters were elicited from two primary name generators administered at the six-month interview. Egocentric network predictors were used in analyses for research question number one and as covariates in analyses for research question number two. First, in the household section, interviewers asked parents to list "people you are living with, including family members, friends, or roommates, and people you live with both full-time and part-time." For parents who were unhoused, interviewers

probed for “any people that you consider yourself to be living with.” Up to seven household alters could be named; any additional co-residents were recorded only as a total count.

Second, in the social support and friendships section, parents were asked to list “people who are most important to you who do not live with you,” such as family members, romantic partners, and friends. Interviewers instructed parents to start with the person with whom they had the most contact in the past month and proceed to those with less contact. Children and their caregivers were excluded from this section because they were assessed elsewhere in the interview. Up to six non-household alters could be named; additional important non-household ties were captured only as a total count.

Across both generators, alters were recorded by first name and last initial and characterized by relationship type (*e.g.,* romantic partner, family member, friend). Counts of additional “all others combined” were not used in the main network measures because these individuals were not individually named and lacked tie-level data. Ego-network size was operationalized as degree, defined as the number of unique, individually named alters across the two name generators (*i.e.,* household and non-household). *Total degree* was computed for the full network, including the total of alters named in both name generators, and was used in part to construct the following family and non-family count variables.

Family Count

Family count was operationalized as the number of individually named alters identified as family members across the full ego network. Family members were defined using relationship type codes assigned to each named alter and included biological relatives (*e.g.,* children, parents, grandparents, aunts, uncles, and siblings), step relatives, foster relatives, and adoptive relatives or guardians. Married spouses were classified as family. In-laws (*e.g.,* mother-in-law, father-in-law,

siblings-in-law) were also classified as family, reflecting their role as legally affiliated kin. Ex-spouses were classified as family, given their prior legal marital status.

Non-Family Count

Non-family count was operationalized as the number of individually named alters identified as non-family members across the full ego network. Alters coded as non-relative figures (*i.e.,* fictive kin, individuals playing family-like roles without biological or legal ties, such as a non-relative mother or father figure), unmarried romantic partners, and ex-partners who were never married were classified as non-family. This distinction preserves the difference between legally and biologically defined kin, who may carry distinct resource obligations and expectations, and informal or romantic ties, while important, reflect a different relational structure.

Perceived Lack of Network Support

Perceived lack of network support was operationalized as a binary indicator derived from participants' ratings of the supportiveness of their named close ties. Perceived support was assessed for each named alter in both the household and non-household rosters on a scale from 0 (*not at all supportive*) to 10 (*extremely supportive*). A composite support score was created by averaging the perceived support rating across all named alters.

Preliminary analyses indicated that the continuous composite was not suitable for use in logistic regression models as scored. Among participants with at least one named alter, nearly half scored at the scale maximum of 10 (n = 141, 49.8%; M = 9.16, SD = 1.37), indicating a substantial ceiling effect. A Box-Tidwell test also confirmed significant non-linearity in the log-odds (p = .015). The ceiling effect likely reflected, at least in part, a design artifact as both name generators pre-select supportive alters by construction — the household roster captures co-

residents, and the non-household roster asks for "most important" non-household ties, thereby biasing support ratings upward. This interpretation is further supported by the strong association between perceived support and perceived closeness, which were assessed alongside one another for each named alter and were highly correlated (r = .72). Given this statistical redundancy, perceived closeness was excluded from all primary models.

Accordingly, the continuous composite was dichotomized to create a binary indicator of perceived lack of network support (0 = *full support, composite score 10/10*; 1 = *any score below the scale maximum or no named alters*). This operationalization reflects a distinction in which the support items ask participants directly how supportive their important people are, and any below-ceiling response plausibly reflects a perceived limitation in the quality of that support. For the 16 participants who named zero network members, a composite score was structurally indeterminate; these participants were coded 1, reflecting the interpretation that the absence of any network members constitutes unavailable support. This decision retained all 299 participants in models that used this predictor.

Among the 283 participants with at least one named alter, 141 (49.8%) scored at the scale maximum and were coded 0; 142 (50.2%) scored below the maximum and were coded 1. Including the 16 zero-degree participants coded 1, a total of 158 participants (52.8% of N = 299) were coded as perceiving a lack of full support, with no missing data on this variable.

Weekly Social Circle Predictors

Following the ego network name generators, participants were prompted to report on the characteristics of the broader set of people they spend time with at least weekly since release; these could include friends, family, and romantic partners, but they were not explicitly named. The following variables were used in analyses for research question two.

Weekly social circle size

Weekly social circle size was assessed with the item, “About how many people would you say you spend time with at least once a week or more?” This item yields a count of the number of people in the respondent's weekly social circle. Due to a strong positive skew in the raw distribution, circle size was log-transformed ($\log(x + 1)$) prior to analyses; nine participants who reported zero weekly contacts received a value of zero under this transformation.

Continuity of Pre-Prison Ties

Continuity of pre-prison ties was assessed with the item, “How many of these people since/during your release are people that you knew before you went to prison?” Responses were recorded using a 5-point proportion scale (*All, Most, Some, Very few, None*), coded from 5 to 1. Preliminary analyses revealed a ceiling effect (40.6% of participants at the maximum) and non-linearity in the relationship with log-odds (Box-Tidwell test, $p = .004$), which, combined with the scale's proportion-based format, supported a binary operationalization. Continuity of pre-prison ties is therefore coded as a binary indicator distinguishing participants whose weekly circle is composed predominantly of pre-prison contacts (1 = *All or Most*) from those with a more mixed or newly formed post-release circle (0 = *Some, Very few, or None*). This distinction captures whether the participant's routine social environment reflects continuity with pre-incarceration relationships or a meaningfully different post-release network.

Risk Composition

Parents reported the extent to which people in their weekly social circle engaged in behaviors reflecting illegal activity and justice-system contact using the same 5-point proportion scale (*All, Most, Some, Very few, None*; coded 5–1). Fifteen items captured behaviors such as theft-related activities (*e.g.,* breaking into places to steal; selling drugs or stolen goods), violence

and weapon use (*e.g.,* carrying hidden weapons; attacking someone with intent to seriously hurt or kill; using force to obtain money or possessions), gang involvement, justice-system contact (*e.g.,* being arrested; spending time in jail/prison; doing things for which they could be arrested), and use of hard drugs such as methamphetamine, heroin, cocaine, or LSD. The 15-item scale demonstrated excellent internal consistency (α = .929).

Preliminary analyses revealed a severe floor effect where 49.4% of participants reported "None" on all 15 items, indicating that nearly half the sample reported no contacts engaging in risk-related activities in their weekly social circle. Because the continuous scale provides little useful variance for this portion of the sample, risk composition was operationalized as a binary indicator of risk-related exposure (0 = *no contacts engaging in risk activity across all 15 items*; 1 = *any contacts engaging in a risk activity*).

Prosocial Composition

Parents also reported on prosocial and desistance-related characteristics of their weekly contacts using the same 5-point proportion scale (*All, Most, Some, Very few, None*; coded 5–1). Items assessed the extent to which weekly contacts (a) had a job, (b) graduated from high school, and (c) graduated from college. A fourth item, assessing the proportion of contacts who "had gotten into trouble in the past but were staying out of trouble" around the time of the participant's arrest, was evaluated for inclusion but dropped based on scale reliability analyses. This item showed a near-zero corrected item-total correlation and correlated negatively with the remaining items, reflecting a conceptually distinct construct. The three-item prosocial composition scale demonstrated acceptable internal consistency (α = .556) and is scored such that higher values indicate a larger share of weekly contacts engaged in employment and education.

Reentry Outcomes

Reentry outcomes were measured at six months post-release, including housing stability, employment, and criminalized behavior.

Housing stability

Housing stability was operationalized as a binary indicator derived from the question, "What type of housing are you currently living in?" Responses were coded as stable housing (1) when participants reported living in a house or trailer, apartment or duplex, or another noninstitutional residence, including a partner's or family member's home. Responses were coded as unstable housing (0) when participants reported living in a shelter or emergency housing, experiencing homelessness, staying in a hotel, motel, or other pay-by-day/week residence, or residing in a residential treatment program or halfway house.

Housing stability was not included as an outcome in the primary logistic regression models. Preliminary analyses indicated that only 27 of 242 non-incarcerated participants (11.2%) reported unstable housing, which was far below the 10-events-per-predictor threshold to support a model with 12 predictors (Peduzzi et al., 1996). Of those 27 unstable cases, 21 (78%) were residing in residential treatment or a halfway house, the most conceptually ambiguous category. Given these constraints, the 88.8% stable housing rate is reported descriptively.

Employment

Employment was derived from items asking about work in the period leading up to the six-month interview. Parents were asked a series of questions about employment since their release, including “Have you had a job or jobs since (while) you were released from prison? 1- Yes 2- No”. Responses to this question were used to create a binary indicator (0 = *no employment since release*; 1 = *any employment since release*). While there were other options for

measuring employment, such as current employment status, I decided to select the most inclusive operationalization of "any employment post-release" to maintain sample size, as literature points to considerable challenges of gaining and maintaining consistent employment during the early reentry period (Harding et al., 2014). Having secured a job early post-release may indicate stronger employable skills developed before incarceration or more connections to employment resources, such as agency support or individual relationships that help secure a job.

Post-release Criminalized Behavior

Post-release criminalized behavior was operationalized as engaging in behavior that could lead to getting in trouble with the police between release and the six-month follow-up. Drawn from a self-reported behaviors checklist indexed from the Elliot Social Behavior Questionnaire (Elliot et al., 1985), where participants were prompted to indicate the number of times they participated in "behavior that could lead to trouble with the police." The checklist includes behaviors conventionally classified as criminal offenses, such as theft, violent behavior, and illegal drug sales, as well as behaviors that may be subject to criminal legal response in public or highly surveilled contexts, such as public intoxication, hitchhiking, and paid sexual relations. For this reason, and to use intentional language that avoids characterizing participants by their involvement in the criminal legal system, I used the term "criminalized behavior" to describe the outcome (Cox, 2020). The measure was coded as a binary indicator (0 = *no criminalized behavior*, 1 = *any criminalized behavior*).

Control Variables

All multivariable models were adjusted for a set of covariates selected based on prior literature and the Parent Child Study design. Parent sociodemographic characteristics included gender (0 = *female or mother*, 1 = *male or father*), race/ethnicity (0 = *White*, 1 = *non-White*),

educational attainment (0 = *less than high school*, 1 = *high school diploma/GED or higher*), and pre-incarceration employment (0 = *not employed at the time of arrest*, 1 = *employed at the time of arrest*). Intervention assignment (0 = *services-as-usual*, 1 = *Parenting Intervention*) was included to account for any residual effects of exposure to the parenting intervention on reentry outcomes. These covariates were intended to help isolate the associations between the egocentric network and social circle characteristics and reentry outcomes from confounding by demographic and intervention-related factors. Institutional context was controlled for because no meaningful nesting effects by facility were detected in prior analyses of these data.

Analytic Strategy

Preliminary Analyses

All analyses were conducted in R (version 4.5.2; R Core Team, 2026). Prior to primary modeling, a series of preliminary analyses were conducted to evaluate data quality and inform final variable operationalization decisions. Attrition analyses compared participants retained in the analytic sample to those lost to follow-up on baseline sociodemographic and risk indicators; results are reported in the Analytic Sample section. Within the analytic sample, missingness was examined for all analytic variables, and logistic regression analyses were used to test whether baseline characteristics predicted item-level missingness. Scale reliability was assessed for the risk and prosocial composition measures using Cronbach's alpha and corrected item-total correlations. Distributional properties, including ceiling and floor effects, were inspected for all continuous predictors. Functional form assumptions were evaluated using Box-Tidwell tests for linearity in the log-odds. Variance inflation factors were examined to assess multicollinearity among predictors, including between family count and non-family count (VIF < 3), confirming that collinearity did not threaten model stability. These analyses resulted in several variable

operationalization decisions documented in the Measures section, including the binary coding of risk composition and continuity of pre-prison ties, the exclusion of mean closeness due to collinearity, and the restriction of housing stability to descriptive reporting.

Missing Data

Item-level missingness within the analytic sample ($N = 299$) was addressed using Multiple Imputation by Chained Equations (MICE; van Buuren & Groothuis-Oudshoorn, 2011), implemented in the MICE package. Four variables had item-level missingness and were handled under a missing at random (MAR) assumption (Rubin, 1976): post-release criminalized behavior (6.7%), employment (7.0%), pre-incarceration education (0.3%), and pre-incarceration employment (0.3%). Because each variable was binary, missing values were imputed using logistic regression. Twenty imputed datasets were generated ($m = 20$), a conservative choice given the relatively low level of item-level missingness and consistent with guidance favoring a larger number of imputations to reduce simulation error and improve the stability of standard errors (White et al., 2011; von Hippel, 2020).

Parameter estimates were pooled across imputed datasets using Rubin's rules. Several variables were not imputed because their missing values reflect structural missingness rather than random data loss. Social circle composition variables, including log-transformed circle size, binary risk composition, binary pre-prison tie continuity, and prosocial composition, were not applicable for participants who reported having no weekly social circle ($n \approx 27$–34); for these individuals, social circle composition questions were not administered. Imputing composition scores for participants without a weekly social circle was similarly inappropriate. These cases are excluded from models that include the relevant variables.

Primary Models

To address RQ1, logistic regression models were estimated for each outcome (employment and post-release criminalized behavior), with ego-network features measured at the six-month interview as the primary predictors. Each model included family count, non-family count, and a binary indicator of perceived lack of support, along with the five covariates described above. These models test hypotheses 1b and 1c by estimating whether ego-network features were associated with odds of employment and post-release criminalized behavior while adjusting for covariates. It is important to note that family count and non-family count are complementary components of total ego network size and are entered simultaneously in all models to decompose network size into its theoretically distinct elements. When modeled together, the coefficient for each variable represents its unique contribution, holding the others constant (i.e., the effect of each additional family tie net of non-family ties and vice versa).

To address RQ2, each RQ1 model was extended by adding weekly social circle characteristics: log-transformed social circle size, binary continuity of pre-prison, binary risk composition, and continuous prosocial composition. These models test Hypotheses 2b and 2c by evaluating whether weekly social exposure is associated with employment and post-release criminalized behavior after adjusting for ego-network features and covariates. Housing stability (H1a, H2a) was not examined in logistic regression models due to insufficient outcome variability (88.8% stable; $n = 27$ unstable cases).

CHAPTER III

RESULTS

Preliminary Analyses

Prior to the primary analyses, a series of preliminary diagnostic analyses were conducted to evaluate scale reliability, assess distributional properties and potential floor and ceiling effects, examine multicollinearity, and test functional form assumptions for continuous predictors.

Descriptive Statistics

The analytic sample comprised 299 corrections-involved parents who completed the six-month follow-up interview (see Table 1). The sample included 176 mothers (58.9%) and 123 fathers (41.1%). Approximately three-fifths of participants identified as White (n = 177, 59.2%), and the majority held a GED or higher level of educational attainment (n = 194, 65.1%) and had been employed at the time of their most recent arrest (n = 181, 60.7%). Just over half were assigned to the parenting intervention condition (n = 166, 55.5%).

Regarding six-month outcomes, 90 participants (32.3% of n = 279 with valid data) reported any post-release criminalized behavior, and 207 participants (74.5% of n = 278 with valid data) reported any employment since release. Among the 242 non-incarcerated participants, 215 (88.8%) were stably housed at six months; given the near-ceiling rate and insufficient events for modeling, housing stability is reported descriptively only.

Ego networks averaged 3.50 members (SD = 2.33, range: 0–12), of whom an average of 2.10 were family members (SD = 2.03, range: 0–9). Of the 283 participants with valid data on network support, 142 (50.2%) reported any perceived lack of support (*i.e.,* a composite support score below the scale maximum). Within participants' broader weekly social circles, half reported having any contacts engaged in risk-related behavior (n = 134, 50.6% of n = 265 with

valid data), and nearly two-thirds reported that all or most of their weekly contacts were people they had known before incarceration (n = 164, 61.7% of n = 266). Prosocial composition averaged 3.16 (SD = 0.94, range: 1–5).

Table 1
Descriptive Statistics for Study Variables

Variable	*M (SD)*	*n* (%)	Range	*N*	Missing
Outcomes	—	—	—		
Post-release criminalized behavior (Any)	—	90 (32.3%)	—	279	20
Employed since release	—	207 (74.5%)	—	278	21
Ego Network Predictors	—	—	—		
Total network size (ego degree)	3.50 (2.33)	—	0.00–12.00	299	0
Non-family members in network	1.39 (1.44)	—	0.00–8.00	299	0
Family members in network	2.10 (2.03)	—	0.00–9.00	299	0
Perceived lack of support (any score < 10)[a]	—	158 (52.8%)	—	299	0
Social Circle Predictors	—	—	—		
Weekly social circle size (log)	1.75 (0.77)	—	0.00–4.11	272	27
Risk composition (Any)	—	134 (50.6%)	—	265	34
Pre-prison ties (All/Most)	—	164 (61.7%)	—	266	33
Prosocial composition (1–5)	3.16 (0.94)	—	1.00–5.00	265	34
Control Variables	—	—	—		
Father (vs. mother)	—	123 (41.1%)	—	299	0
Non-White (vs. White)	—	122 (40.8%)	—	299	0
GED or higher (vs. less than HS)	—	194 (65.1%)	—	298	1
Employed at time of arrest	—	181 (60.7%)	—	298	1
Parenting intervention (vs. SAU)	—	166 (55.5%)	—	299	0

Note. Statistics from observed pre-imputation data. Binary variables coded 1 = presence of characteristic. [a] Perceived lack of support: 1 = total network support below ceiling (< 10); 0 = full support (= 10).

Primary Analyses

All primary models were fitted to m = 20 multiply imputed datasets and pooled using Rubin's rules. Odds ratios (OR) and 95% confidence intervals (CI) are reported. Statistical significance was evaluated at $p < .05$.

Research Question 1: Ego Network Predictors

Two binary logistic regression models were estimated to address RQ1. Predictors included family count, non-family count, and perceived lack of support, along with five control variables: gender, race/ethnicity, education, pre-arrest employment, and intervention group. The model predicting post-release criminalized behavior explained 14.3% of the variance in the outcome (Nagelkerke $R^2 = .143$), and the model predicting employment explained 15.7% (Nagelkerke $R^2 = .157$). Full results are presented in Table 2.

Post-release Criminalized Behavior. A greater number of family members in the ego network was associated with significantly lower odds of post-release criminalized behavior (OR = 0.75, 95% CI [0.61, 0.94], $p = .012$), consistent with Hypothesis 1c. Non-family count and perceived lack of support were not significantly associated with criminalized behavior. No control variables reached conventional significance; however, fathers showed higher odds of criminalized behavior relative to mothers (OR = 1.75, 95% CI [0.99, 3.10], $p = .055$), and participants in the parenting intervention showed lower odds relative to the services-as-usual group (OR = 0.61, 95% CI [0.35, 1.04], $p = .070$).

Employment. A greater number of non-family members in the ego network was associated with significantly higher odds of employment since release (OR = 1.36, 95% CI [1.07, 1.74], $p = .012$), contrary to Hypothesis 1b. Family count (OR = 0.80, 95% CI [0.62, 1.04], $p = .089$) and perceived lack of support were not significantly associated with employment. Pre-

arrest employment was the strongest predictor in the model (*OR* = 3.19, 95% CI [1.73, 5.88], $p <$ .001).

Table 2
RQ1: Logistic Regression on Ego Network Predictors

Predictor	Post-release CB OR [95% CI]	Employment OR [95% CI]	*p* (Post-release CB)	*p* (Emp.)
Ego Network Predictors				
Non-family members in network	0.99 [0.83, 1.19]	1.36 [1.07, 1.74]*	0.906	0.012
Family members in network	0.75 [0.61, 0.94]*	0.8 [0.62, 1.04]†	0.012	0.089
Perceived lack of support	1.54 [0.89, 2.66]	1.37 [0.78, 2.42]	0.122	0.276
Control Variables				
Father (vs. mother)	1.75 [0.99, 3.1]†	1.33 [0.7, 2.53]	0.055	0.384
Non-White (vs. White)	1.04 [0.59, 1.83]	0.63 [0.35, 1.14]	0.886	0.127
GED or higher	1.38 [0.77, 2.48]	0.87 [0.46, 1.64]	0.282	0.661
Employed at arrest	1.12 [0.63, 2.02]	3.19 [1.73, 5.88]***	0.694	0.000
Parenting intervention	0.61 [0.35, 1.04]†	0.77 [0.43, 1.37]	0.070	0.373
N	299	299		
Nagelkerke R²	0.143	0.157		

*Note. Results pooled across m = 20 imputed datasets. OR = odds ratio; 95% CI in brackets. Perceived lack of support was coded 1 if a participant's mean network support score fell below the scale maximum (< 10 out of 10), indicating at least some perceived limitation in the support provided by their close ties; 0 = full perceived support across all named network members (= 10 out of 10). † p < .10. * p < .05. ** p < .01. *** p < .001.*

Research Question 2: Ego Network and Social Circle Predictors

RQ2 models added four social circle predictors (log-transformed circle size, risk composition, pre-prison tie predominance, and prosocial composition) to the RQ1 predictor set. Participants with structural missingness on social circle variables were excluded, reducing the analytic sample to $N = 263$. The model predicting post-release criminalized behavior explained 22.4% of variance (Nagelkerke $R^2 = .224$), and the model predicting employment explained 26.0% (Nagelkerke $R^2 = .260$). Full results are presented in Table 3.

Post-release Criminalized Behavior. Any contacts engaged in risk-related activity in the weekly social circle were the strongest predictor of post-release criminalized behavior (OR = 3.26, 95% CI [1.71, 6.22], $p < .001$), consistent with hypothesis 2c. Participants with any contacts engaged in risk-related activity had approximately 3.3 times the odds of post-release criminalized behavior compared to those with none. Family count remained independently protective after adjusting for social circle characteristics ($OR = 0.74$, 95% CI [0.59, 0.94], $p = .014$). Social circle size, pre-prison tie predominance, prosocial composition, non-family count, and perceived lack of support were not significantly associated with criminalized behavior. No control variables reached significance.

Employment. Pre-prison tie predominance was the most notable social circle predictor of employment. Participants whose weekly social circle was composed predominantly of pre-prison ties (All/Most) had significantly lower odds of employment relative to those with more mixed or newly formed post-release social circles (OR = 0.22, 95% CI [0.10, 0.48], $p < .001$). Prosocial composition was also significantly and positively associated with employment – each one-unit increase in prosocial composition was associated with 42% higher odds of employment (OR = 1.42, 95% CI [1.01, 2.01], $p = .045$), consistent with Hypothesis 2b. Pre-arrest employment

remained the strongest overall predictor (OR = 3.44, 95% CI [1.76, 6.70], $p < .001$). Non-family count (OR = 1.28, 95% CI [0.98, 1.66], $p = .070$), family count, social circle size, risk composition, and perceived lack of support were not significantly associated with employment. No control variables other than pre-arrest employment reached significance.

Table 3

RQ2: Logistic Regression on Ego Network and Social Circle Predictors

Predictor	Post-release CB OR [95% CI]	Employment OR [95% CI]	*p* (Post-release CB)	*p* (Emp.)
Ego Network Predictors				
Non-family members in network	1.01 [0.83, 1.24]	1.28 [0.98, 1.66]†	0.885	0.070
Family members in network	0.74 [0.59, 0.94]*	0.9 [0.68, 1.2]	0.014	0.466
Perceived lack of support	1.39 [0.77, 2.51]	1.41 [0.74, 2.67]	0.276	0.294
Social Circle Predictors				
Social circle size (log)	1 [0.66, 1.53]	1.11 [0.69, 1.79]	0.983	0.664
Risk composition (Any)	3.26 [1.71, 6.22]***	0.93 [0.47, 1.85]	0.000	0.835
Pre-prison ties (All/Most)	1.52 [0.81, 2.85]	0.22 [0.1, 0.48]***	0.194	0.000
Prosocial composition	0.98 [0.71, 1.36]	1.42 [1.01, 2.01]*	0.921	0.045
Control Variables				
Father (vs. mother)	1.55 [0.84, 2.87]	1.27 [0.63, 2.55]	0.161	0.500
Non-White (vs. White)	1 [0.54, 1.84]	0.72 [0.38, 1.39]	0.997	0.332
GED or higher	1.18 [0.62, 2.26]	0.86 [0.43, 1.7]	0.619	0.661
Employed at arrest	1.3 [0.69, 2.47]	3.44 [1.76, 6.7]***	0.415	0.000
Parenting intervention	0.64 [0.36, 1.15]	0.68 [0.36, 1.28]	0.138	0.230
N	263	263		
Nagelkerke R²	0.224	0.260		

*Note. Results pooled across m = 20 imputed datasets. OR = odds ratio; 95% CI in brackets. Social circle predictors entered after adjusting for ego network predictors and control variables. Risk composition = 1 indicates at least one contact engaged in risk-related activity in the weekly social circle vs. none. Pre-prison ties = 1 indicates all or most weekly contacts were known before incarceration. † p < .10. * p < .05. ** p < .01. *** p < .001.*

CHAPTER IV

DISCUSSION

This dissertation examined how the social relationships of corrections-involved parents during the first six months post-release were associated with key reentry outcomes. Building on critiques of reentry frameworks that emphasize severing ties with antisocial connections (see Binnall, 2019; Wang, 2023), this dissertation examined which features of parents' relational environments were most consequential, and for which reentry outcomes. For parents specifically, this distinction matters because longstanding relationships often provide essential support during reentry, even when those ties appear risky from the outside. The findings indicate that close ego-network ties and the broader weekly social circle are associated with reentry outcomes in distinct ways. In the close network, family members were associated with lower odds of post-release criminalized behaviors, and a greater non-family count was associated with higher odds of employment. In the broader weekly social circle, any relationships engaged in risk-related activities were the strongest predictor of post-release criminalized behavior; parents whose social circles were predominantly composed of pre-prison ties had substantially lower odds of employment, and parents whose social circles were composed of more prosocially engaged contacts had higher odds of employment. These findings point to an important tension in the conceptual application of social capital (see Erices-Ocampo et al., 2025) in which relational stability and access to opportunity do not always align for corrections-involved parents during reentry. While these patterns are broadly consistent with literature linking social ties to recidivism and employment during reentry, they carry additional implications for practice, particularly for the design of post-release supervision conditions. Policies that broadly restrict contact with individuals with prior system involvement may sever the kin-based connections that

this study found are associated with lower criminalized behavior. While at the same time, leaving unaddressed the specific risk-related exposures most strongly associated with reoffending. The following sections discuss these findings by outcome and describe the change in association when social circle predictors were added to the model. I draw on Coleman's (1988, 1990) "safety net" and Lin's (1999, 2001) social resource "ladder" for interpretation, with attention to how social support and social capital can diverge within the same relational environments.

Post-Release Criminalized Behavior

In the ego-network model, family count was the only significant predictor of post-release criminalized behavior—each additional family member named in the close network was associated with lower odds of this outcome. Non-family count and perceived lack of support were not significantly associated with criminalized behavior. No control variables reached conventional significance, though fathers showed higher odds of post-release criminalized behavior relative to mothers, and participants in the parenting intervention showed lower odds relative to the services-as-usual group; both effects should be interpreted cautiously given their magnitude and confidence intervals. When social circle characteristics were added, the presence of any contacts engaged in risk-related activities emerged as the strongest predictor in the study, and this association held after adjusting for all ego-network characteristics and covariates. Family count remained protective in the full model; social circle size, continuity of pre-prison ties, and prosocial composition were not significantly associated with this outcome.

Family Count and the Social Capital "Safety Net"

The persistence of the family count association after social circle characteristics, namely risk composition, were added is notable. It indicates that kin networks offer a distinct form of protection that can function simultaneously with risk exposure from members in the broader

social environment. The protective association for family count is consistent with prior research documenting family ties as a buffer against reoffending during reentry (*e.g.,* Berg & Huebner, 2011; Mowen & Visher, 2015; Mowen et al., 2019). However, this finding should not be interpreted to mean that family involvement is uniformly protective. Due to measurement, this finding likely captures the protective association of positive family features (*e.g.,* healthy and helpful relationships) more so than negative family features (*e.g.,* conflict and strained relationships). Prior research shows that family relationships characterized by high conflict are associated with worse rather than better outcomes (Mowen & Visher, 2015).

Additionally, because the present study operationalized family involvement as a count of named family ties, the finding represents the structural presence of family members in the close network. This distinction is important for interpreting why family count may matter. Mowen et al. (2019) found that the protective role of family during reentry operates primarily through instrumental support rather than emotional or relational support alone. In the present study, a larger number of family members in the close network may reflect greater access to practical, day-to-day assistance during a high-demand period of reentry.

The null finding of perceived lack of support, operationalized as whether any close tie fell below the ceiling on support ratings, alongside the significant protective effect of family count, demonstrates the theoretical distinction between social support and social capital outlined in this study's conceptual framework (see Figure 1). Returning parents often need help with housing stability, transportation, childcare logistics, supervision requirements, and daily structure. When these demands are distributed across several family members, support may be more sustainable because no single relationship is required to absorb the full emotional, practical, and caregiving burden of reentry. Smaller family networks may still be caring and

committed, but they may have less capacity to provide the consistent instrumental support and accountability needed to reduce criminalized behavior.

This interpretation aligns with Coleman's (1988, 1990) conceptualization of social capital as generated through trust, obligations, expectations, and informal social control within close, interdependent networks. It also reflects what Putnam (2000) describes as bonding social capital, or the forms of support and mutual obligation generated within close-knit networks. Family members named as co-residents or as important non-household contacts may be especially likely to provide routine-based accountability, reminders, transportation, childcare support, and other forms of practical assistance that help parents maintain stability during reentry. From this perspective, the protective association of family count may reflect kin-based bonding social capital, in other words, resources embedded in close family relationships that can be mobilized to meet basic needs and reinforce accountability.

Social Circle Risk Exposure

The social circle finding adds a distinct layer in which regular exposure to contacts engaged in risk-related activity was associated with substantially higher odds of post-release criminalized behavior, pointing to the relevance of the broader social environment beyond what close network composition captures alone. In other words, parents may simultaneously benefit from family-based instrumental support while also remaining exposed to social contexts where risk is present. This pattern is consistent with Boman and Mowen's (2017) finding that family support can be protective while peer criminality remains a significant risk factor for post-release substance use. Applied to the present study, this suggests that family ties may serve a protective function but may not fully offset exposure to broader social environments characterized by contacts who engage in risky behavior. This pattern also illustrates how social support and social

capital do not always align. Parents embedded in broader social circles that include contacts engaged in risk-related activity may experience relational belonging while not being embedded in the accountability structures associated with lower odds of post-release criminalized behavior which is a dynamic consistent with what the negative social capital literature describes as social connection that does not translate into prosocially oriented capital (Portes, 1998).

A measurement limitation is worth noting when interpreting these findings. The ego-network and social circle instruments are operationalized separately and contribute independently to the models, but the data do not permit identification of whether contacts engaged in risk-related activity in the weekly social circle are family members, or whether they overlap with individuals named in the ego network. Some overlap is plausible, which limits conclusions about whether protective and risk-relevant influences are distributed across distinct relationships or co-present within the same relationships. The independent contribution of both family count and risk composition in the full model is consistent with the interpretation that these measures are capturing meaningfully different dimensions of parents' relational environments.

Post-Release Employment

In the ego-network model, non-family count was positively associated with employment, contrary to the hypothesis that ego-network characteristics would show little to no association with this outcome. Family count, by contrast, showed only a marginal negative trend and was not a significant predictor of employment. Perceived lack of support was not associated with employment. Pre-arrest employment was by far the strongest predictor in the ego-network model, underscoring the role of prior labor market attachment as a baseline resource that extends well beyond network characteristics.

When social circle characteristics were added to the model, the predominance of pre-prison ties in the weekly social circle emerged as the strongest network predictor of employment. Parents whose weekly social circles were composed predominantly of pre-prison ties had substantially lower odds of employment compared to those with more mixed or newly formed post-release circles. Prosocial composition was also significantly and positively associated with employment: each one-unit increase in prosocial composition was associated with 42% higher odds of employment, consistent with hypothesis 2b. The positive association between non-family count and employment attenuated in the full model and did not reach conventional significance and family count was not significantly associated with employment. Risk composition and social circle size were not significantly associated with employment. Pre-arrest employment remained the dominant predictor across both models.

Employment and the Social Capital "Ladder"

The employment findings, considered alongside each other, point to a coherent pattern in which what appears to matter for employment during reentry is less the size or closeness of the ego network and more so the characteristics of the broader social environment in which parents are embedded. In the ego-network model, non-family count was positively associated with employment. However, this association attenuated when social circle characteristics were added and did not reach conventional significance in the full model. This shift suggests that the initial association between non-family count and employment does not reflect an independent effect of close-network breadth, but rather that parents with more diverse close networks also tend to be embedded in broader social circles that are more prosocially oriented and extend further beyond pre-incarceration relationships. The social circle measures appear to capture the proximal mechanisms more directly, and once they are in the model, ego network characteristics carry

little additional explanatory weight. Non-family count may be best understood as a distal marker for the kind of relational openness and network diversity that the social circle variables measure more precisely.

The prosocial composition findings further support this interpretation, as each one-unit increase in the prosocial orientation of the weekly social circle was associated with 42% higher odds of employment, consistent with hypothesis 2b. Contacts who are themselves employed, enrolled in school, or maintaining stable family lives may facilitate labor market access through the informational channels and referral networks, mechanisms consistent with Lin's (1999, 2001) account of social resources embedded in networks. Significance of the behavioral orientation of the social circle carried relevance for employment above and beyond whether that circle was composed of pre- or post-release contacts. Furthermore, the modest internal consistency of the prosocial composition scale likely influences this association; thus, the magnitude of the effect may be understated.

Post-release Network Continuity and Negative Social Capital

The pre-prison ties finding offers the clearest illustration of negative social capital in the present study. Parents whose weekly social circles were composed predominantly of pre-prison contacts had nearly 80% lower odds of employment compared to those with more mixed or newly formed post-release circles. Portes (1998) argues that the same mechanisms generating social capital benefits from a bonding perspective (*e.g.,* trust, reciprocity, shared norms, network closure) can simultaneously constrain individual outcomes. His account of downward-leveling norms, in which the demand for group conformity can limit the achievements of members who seek to move in new directions, is particularly relevant when applied to the reentry context.

A weekly circle anchored in pre-incarceration relationships may provide belonging and stability, but it may also be structurally embedded in the same social spaces, with access to the same information and the same labor-market resources as before incarceration. The present findings cannot distinguish whether pre-prison tie predominance constrains employment through normative pressure, limited structural access to new opportunity networks, or both. However, the simultaneous significance of prosocial composition suggests that both the origin of social ties and the activities, roles, and resources present within those networks may matter for employment after release.

Furthermore, the negative social capital interpretation is supported by what the data do not show. Pre-prison tie predominance was not associated with post-release criminalized behavior, and network risk composition was not associated with employment. If pre-prison ties constrained employment primarily because they exposed parents to illegal activity or other risks, some association with post-release criminalized behavior would have been expected. Thus, the absence suggests that what pre-prison tie predominance captures is a deficit in bridging capital to connect parents to new opportunity structures (Granovetter, 1973; Putnam, 2000). This pattern maps directly onto the conceptual framing in Figure 1. Pre-prison relationships are not inherently unsupportive or risky; for many parents, they represent the most trusted and accessible relationships available during reentry, which aligns with Quadrant A. High Support, Low Capital (*i.e.,* close, dependable relationships that provide care and stability without connecting parents to the opportunity structures that employment requires).

In sum, the combination of the prosocial composition and pre-prison tie findings suggests that both the continuity of social connections and the prosocial context those connections provide appear to matter for employment access. Pre-arrest employment was

included as a covariate in the models as the literature consistently identifies prior work history as one of the strongest predictors of post-release employment (*e.g.,* Duwe & Clark, 2017). As anticipated, pre-arrest employment was the most influential across both models, pointing to the cumulative dimension of labor-market capital, which makes the pre-prison continuity and prosocial composition of the social network even more informative. Parents who were employed before incarceration may return with stronger work histories, marketable skills, employer references, and familiarity with workplace norms—resources that no current network configuration can fully substitute for. This is especially important when considering reentry programming for individuals with limited work history or returning from lengthy sentences, as programs may be able to provide new connections in more prosocial circles, helping to build work histories that may function similarly over time.

Caregiving Context and Intervention

The present study was conducted within the context of the PCS, a randomized controlled trial of the PIO program, and all participants were corrections-involved parents. This design feature is both a strength and a source of important interpretive context. Because social support and social capital were examined within a sample defined entirely by parenthood, the findings cannot be disentangled from the caregiving relationships that structure reentry for this population.

This is most consequential for the post-release criminalized behavior findings. Family members who are named as household co-residents or most important non-household contacts likely include not only partners and adult kin, but also children and the co-parents or caregivers who maintain relationships with those children. Prior work from the PCS suggests that this caregiving context shapes reentry trajectories. Burraston and Eddy (2017) found that parents who

had lived with a child before incarceration had fewer post-release arrests than those who had not, and this advantage was present in the control condition but not in the PIO condition, suggesting the program may have extended a protective caregiving effect to parents whose pre-incarceration co-residence was more limited. The present finding that family members in the close ego network are associated with lower odds of post-release criminalized behavior is consistent with this broader pattern that parents embedded in close kin networks are more likely to be navigating reentry within the structure of ongoing caregiving relationships, which may generate the accountability and motivation that Coleman's social capital framework describes. Research on fatherhood during reentry suggests that parenthood itself can serve as a motivation for desistance, as the desire to be present and reliable for one's children may reinforce commitment to conventional behavior (Laird et al., 2020). The present study cannot disaggregate which family members (*e.g.,* children, co-parents, other kin) are driving this effect.

The caregiving context also bears on the employment constraint associated with pre-prison ties. Parents whose routine social circles are composed predominantly of pre-prison contacts may face not only structural anchoring in terms of social information, but also caregiving obligations that make expanding social networks difficult in practice. Childcare arrangements, co-parenting logistics, and informal obligations to kin who provided support during incarceration may all concentrate parents' time and relational energy within pre-prison social spaces, even when those spaces offer limited labor market access. Research on fathers' reintegration finds that coparenting quality and relational stability are central to how family dynamics shape reentry conditions (Muentner & Charles, 2023), suggesting that the caregiving relationships embedded in pre-prison networks may function simultaneously as sources of support and as constraints on network expansion. The present study operationalizes pre-prison tie

predominance as a characteristic of the social environment and does not measure the underlying obligations or caregiving arrangements that may help explain it. The intervention condition (PIO versus services-as-usual) was not significantly associated with either outcome in the models. PIO targets parenting knowledge, skills, parent-caregiver relationships, and family connection, not social network composition per se. Any effects PIO may have on reentry outcomes are most plausibly routed through parent-child relationship quality and parenting behavior, dimensions that the ego network and social circle variables used here do not capture. From that standpoint, a null effect on network-mediated outcomes is consistent with the design logic of the intervention.

The present null finding also does not contradict prior evidence of PIO's effectiveness. Eddy and colleagues (2022) found that PIO participants reported less criminal behavior after release using a continuous measure of the same construct. Because the present study operationalized post-release criminalized behavior as a binary indicator of any offense, it is less sensitive to the kind of graduated reductions in frequency or severity that a parenting skills program is most plausible to produce. The discrepancy likely reflects this measurement difference. Including intervention condition as a covariate in all models does, however, serve an important analytical function in which it ensures that the network findings reported here cannot be attributed to differential program exposure. Parents in the PIO and services-as-usual conditions are represented across the full range of network and social circle configurations, and the associations between those configurations and outcomes are estimated independently of treatment assignment.

Limitations

Several limitations need to be noted as they help inform how these findings are interpreted. Most importantly, the study does not include child-level data or direct measures of

parent-child relationship quality. Because all participants are parents, the caregiving context is pervasive but not modeled. The protective association between family count and post-release criminalized behavior cannot be attributed specifically to children or child-related ties; the constraint on employment associated with pre-prison tie predominance cannot be formally linked to caregiving obligations. These are plausible interpretations given the literature, but they remain inferences. Future research with tie-level data – particularly data identifying which named contacts are children, co-parents, or caregivers – would be needed to test these mechanisms directly.

Second, ego network characteristics were measured at a single point, six months post-release. The cross-sectional design does not permit causal inference. It is plausible, for example, that parents with lower propensity to reoffend seek out or maintain larger family networks, rather than that family network composition causally reduces criminalized behavior. Longitudinal designs with network data collected at multiple post-release intervals would be necessary to establish the direction of effect.

Third, the ego network and social circle instruments are operationalized separately and contribute independently to the models, but the data do not permit identification of whether specific contacts appear in both. Whether contacts engaged in risk-related behavior in the weekly social circle overlap with named kin in the close ego network cannot be answered from these data. Fourth, post-release criminalized behavior was measured by self-report. Participants may underreport offending due to social desirability concerns, and underreporting may vary systematically by gender, intervention condition, or relationship with interviewers. Fifth, the analytic sample consists of parents who completed the six-month follow-up interview. Retained participants were significantly more likely to be female than those lost to follow-up, partially

reflecting the original oversampling of mothers. Findings may generalize less well to fathers navigating reentry, or to parents with more disrupted or transient reentry trajectories who were harder to retain. Sixth, the sample was recruited from Oregon DOC facilities in the context of a randomized trial with active study infrastructure. Generalizability to correctional populations in other states or systems should be treated with caution.

Finally, two measurement limitations bear on specific findings. The prosocial composition scale demonstrated modest internal consistency, which likely attenuates its estimated association with employment; the significant effect obtained here may understate the true magnitude of the relationship. The support items are drawn from name generators that preselect for supportive alters, inflating ratings and producing a ceiling effect that limits the variance available for the dichotomized network support variable to capture; the null finding for perceived support should be interpreted in light of this design artifact.

Implications

The findings from this dissertation have implications for how practitioners, policymakers, and researchers think about social relationships during reentry, particularly for corrections-involved parents. For practitioners designing reentry programming, the results suggest that the relational needs of returning parents are not uniform across outcomes. Close kin networks appear to function as an accountability and stability resource associated with lower post-release criminalized behavior, consistent with Coleman's social capital framework. Broader social environments that provide access to diverse, non-redundant contacts, particularly non-kin relationships that may bridge to employment-relevant information and institutions, appear more consequential for labor market reintegration. Programming that helps parents intentionally cultivate post-release social connections outside of pre-prison networks through employment

services, community organizations, educational settings, or faith communities may facilitate the kind of bridging capital that predominantly pre-prison social circles do not provide. Crucially, such programming need not require parents to sever existing family relationships, which these findings suggest are protective rather than criminogenic, though there may be individual circumstances where reducing contact may be appropriate.

For supervision policy, the results call into question approaches that broadly restrict contact with individuals with criminal justice involvement (see Binnall, 2019; Wang, 2023). The risk-relevant exposure identified in this study is specifically regular contact with contacts engaged in illegal activity or justice-system involvement in the weekly social circle, not family membership or pre-prison contacts more generally. Family members in the close network were among the strongest protective factors for post-release criminalized behavior in this sample. Supervision conditions that restrict where parents can live or whom they can spend time with, particularly conditions that separate parents from family networks, may inadvertently sever ties that appear to be associated with lower reoffending, while leaving unaddressed the specific social-contextual exposures most strongly associated with risk. A more targeted approach, attentive to the behavioral context of social exposure rather than the legal status of contacts, is more consistent with what these data show.

For researchers, this study points to several opportunities for further inquiry. Future studies should include child-level data and direct measures of parent-child relationship quality, both to test whether the family count finding is driven by children specifically and to examine how caregiving obligations shape network composition and mobility during reentry. Longitudinal designs with repeated network assessments would allow direction of effect to be established and examine how the effect may change over time (*i.e.,* do the associations hold,

intensify, or attenuate?). Tie-level data identifying whether specific contacts are family, whether they are pre-prison relationships, and whether they engage in risk-related or prosocial behaviors simultaneously would allow the independent contributions estimated here to be tested more directly. Finally, future work might examine whether parenting interventions like PIO influence the trajectory of network change over time, rather than network composition at a single post-release interval.

Conclusions

This dissertation set out to examine how the social relationships of corrections-involved parents during the first six months post-release are associated with reentry outcomes. The central finding is that close and broader social ties are associated with reentry outcomes in distinct and outcome-specific ways and that the social support available through those relationships and the social capital they generate are conceptually different, even within the same networks.

Family members in the close ego network were associated with lower odds of post-release criminalized behavior, and this effect was specific to biological and legally recognized relationships (*e.g.,* parents, siblings, children, spouses). In the broader weekly social circle, any exposure to contacts engaged in risk-related activity was the strongest predictor of post-release criminalized behavior, while parents whose social circles were composed predominantly of pre-prison relationships faced substantially lower odds of employment. Across both outcomes, the same relational environment (*i.e.,* familiar, continuous, predominantly pre-incarceration ties) appeared to offer stability without mobility.

For corrections-involved parents, this tension between relational stability and opportunity access is not incidental. Reentry unfolds within the ongoing demands of parenthood. Caregiving obligations, co-parenting relationships, and the stakes of child welfare and family reunification

shape how parents navigate their social environments and what those environments are able to offer. The relationships parents sustain and build in the months following release help shape both their day-to-day experiences of reentry and the opportunities available to them. Understanding which features of those relational environments matter, and for which outcomes, is essential to designing programs and policies that meet parents where they are rather than where systems assume they should be.

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