

A First Look at Justice-Involved Women's Egocentric Social Networks

Abstract

Despite the prominence of social support research in the offender rehabilitation literature, network methods have yet to be used to extend research beyond core network support to investigate resources accessible to justice-involved individuals from semi-regular interaction partners. This study is the first to apply egocentric (personal) social network methods to assess the composition and structure of justice-involved individuals' networks. Using data from in-person interviews with 159 justice-involved women about their 1,313 network members, four social layers – *core*, *active peripheral*, *latent peripheral*, and *estranged ties* – are delineated, described, and compared. Findings indicated: 1) there is an abundance of resources available to women in the intermediate and outer social layers of their networks – *active* and *latent peripheral* – that are ignored when scholars exclusively study *core* network members, 2) Latent peripheral ties (i.e., colleagues) provide access to resources associated with women's correctional needs (i.e., legal advice, employment opportunities), and 3) relationships become decentralized and unstable – in terms of frequency of contact, geographical distance, and emotional closeness – from the inner to outer layers. Measuring the outer social layers is critical to identifying relationships that compromise reintegration (i.e., *estranged*) and altering network configurations to improve access to social capital and social support.