

# Help or Hindrance: Female Probationers' Navigation of Supervision Requirements Through Personal Support Networks

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## Reasons for Examining Female Probationers' Support Networks

Strong personal support networks are important for women's successful navigation of community-based correctional supervision requirements. Although variable, correctional requirements may include maintenance of employment; timely attendance at supervision visits; payment of court-related fees; avoidance of assaultive, threatening, or intimidating behaviors; and desistance from crime, substance use, and interactions with criminal peers. These requirements inherently impose the need for strong financial stability and/or social support to provide women with childcare, transportation, and emotional support throughout the correctional process. The purpose of this research is to identify which resources are available to women under supervision and identify their most and least helpful interactions with network members.

## The Research

This study integrates egocentric social network analysis techniques and qualitative methods to examine (a) the characteristics of women's semiregular interaction partners and their provision of resources and (b) the nature of the relationship and key resources provided by the "most helpful" and "least helpful" network member. In-person interviews were conducted with 41 women who provided information about 436 network members. Key variables for the study includes:

- (1) Network Size
  - (2) Network Composition
  - (3) Supervision-Related Resource Support
  - (4) Nomination of the Most Helpful Network Member
  - (5) Nomination of the Least Helpful Network Member
- *Network Size* is a count of the number of network members elicited by the eleven name generators.
  - *Network Composition* refers to several variables that capture the nature of the relationships (e.g., kinship, emotionally close, frequency on contact).
  - *Supervision-Related Resource Support* refers to five types of support provided to participants by network members while under correction supervision (e.g., childcare, payment of fines and fees, emotional support, transportation, and stable housing).
  - *Most Helpful Network Members* were nominated by participants as providing the most support during supervision.
  - *Least Helpful Network Members* were nominated by participants as providing the least support during supervision.

## Results

The size of women's networks ranged from four to 27 network members, with an average size of 10. Most network members were women, employed, and had completed high school. About half of the network members whom women knew while under court supervision did not provide the participant with any resources related to their correctional supervision ( $n = 170, 53\%$ ).

***Most Helpful Network Members:*** Women most commonly selected their mothers and significant others as the most supportive network member. Based on the qualitative narratives, experiences of support were most often related to transportation, followed by financial assistance, emotional support, and advice (see Table 5 from Goodson, 2018). Less common forms of helpfulness noted by participants included childcare, attending court cases, providing support while the participant was in a treatment facility, and facilitating admission into a substance abuse treatment program.

***Least Helpful Network Members:*** Least helpful network members were most commonly friends, followed by siblings and parents. Women most often nominated network members as the least helpful due to geographically or emotionally distant relationships, which limited network members' ability to provide support. The most frequently identified actively unsupportive behavior women noted was failure to provide emotional support. Other themes of negative interactions included encouraging substance use and using substances in the presence of the participant.

**TABLE 5: Descriptions of the Most and Least Helpful Interaction or Resource Provision ( $N = 41$ )**

Description	$n$ (%)
Most helpful interaction or resource provision	
Transportation	16 (39.0)
Financial assistance	13 (31.7)
Emotional support	12 (29.3)
Advice	9 (22.0)
Prevented lawbreaking behaviors	9 (22.0)
Housing	9 (22.0)
Least helpful interaction	
Distant relationships	8 (19.5)
No emotional support	7 (17.1)
Encouraged substance use	6 (14.6)
Substance use in the presence of offender	6 (14.6)

### Implications for Supervision

Women's network members do not fit into dichotomous categories of individuals who provide support and those who encourage antisocial behavior. Establishing strategies for women to discontinue communication with crime- and substance-involved family members or continuing contact, but communicating the need for law-abiding behavior in their presence could assist women in successfully completing supervision requirements and avoiding future substance use. Supervising agents can help women understand their network's composition so they can balance risk of recidivism against needs for support.

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