

Social Support, Trauma & Mental Wellbeing experiences of Imprisoned Men in Northern Ireland

Dr Daniel McFadden
Assistant Professor of Social Work
Maynooth University



Review of the Literature

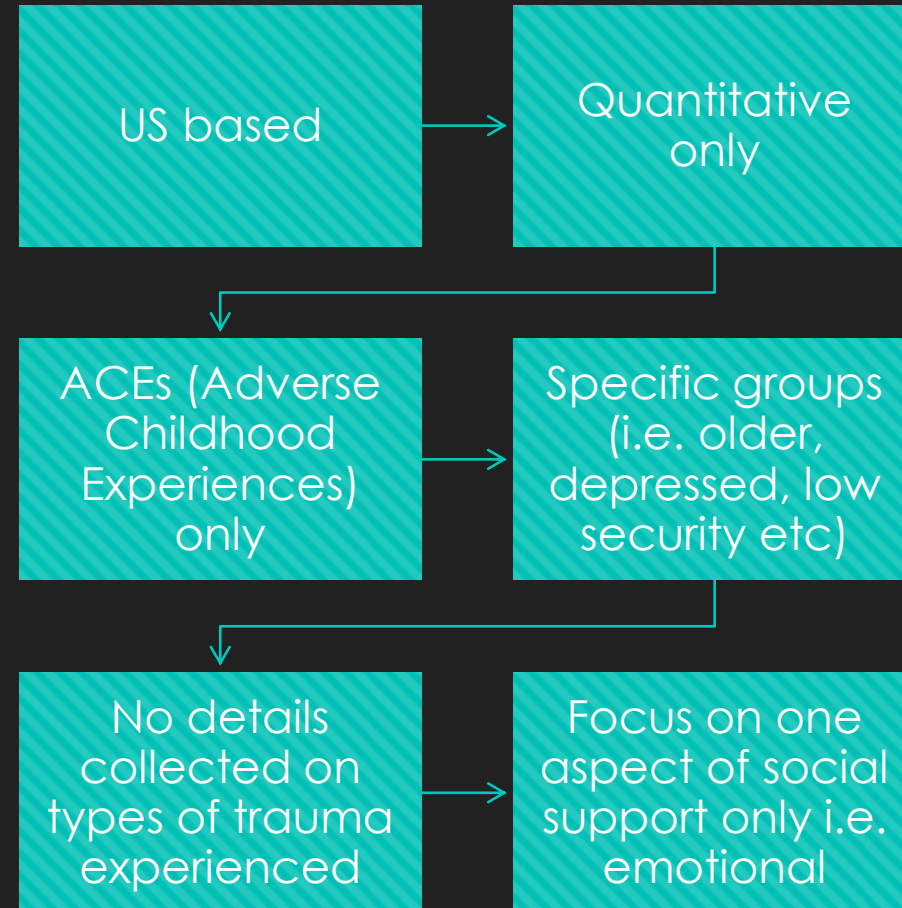
- Social support has long been established as having a direct relationship to mental health and well being (Wang et al., 2018)
- It has been found to 'buffer' the negative impact of stressful life experiences (Hatch et. al, 2020)
- Trauma can negatively impact upon social support, reducing the extent of social networks and ability of some trauma experienced individuals to sustain extensive social support networks (Pettus-Davis, 2014)
- This then reduces that 'buffer' when coping with stressful life experiences in the future (Cohen & Wills, 1985).



What this study seeks to understand:

- What are the pathways between different Trauma Events (TE; Crime related, General Disaster, Physical & Sexual Experiences) and the alterations in Social Support (SS)?
- How do certain demographic factors (age, ethnicity etc) impact upon this relationship?
- What is the ultimate impact upon mental well being when trauma alters SS and when SS thus cannot buffer against the impact of TE?

Limitations of Studies to Date



Study

- Mixed methods
- Survey (Demographic Questions, Multi-Dimensional Scale of Perceived Social Support, Trauma History Questionnaire & the Warwick Edinburgh Mental Well Being Scale; n= 384)
- Qualitative Interviews (n=18)
- Across all three prison sites in NI (Maghaberry, Magilligan & Hydebank)
- Data collection took place from November 2022 to January 2023 (n=384)

Measures

Age

Prison Site

No of times in prison

Ethnicity

Country of Birth

Family Background

Mental Health History

Substance Use History

Crime

Length of Sentence

Time Served

Community Background

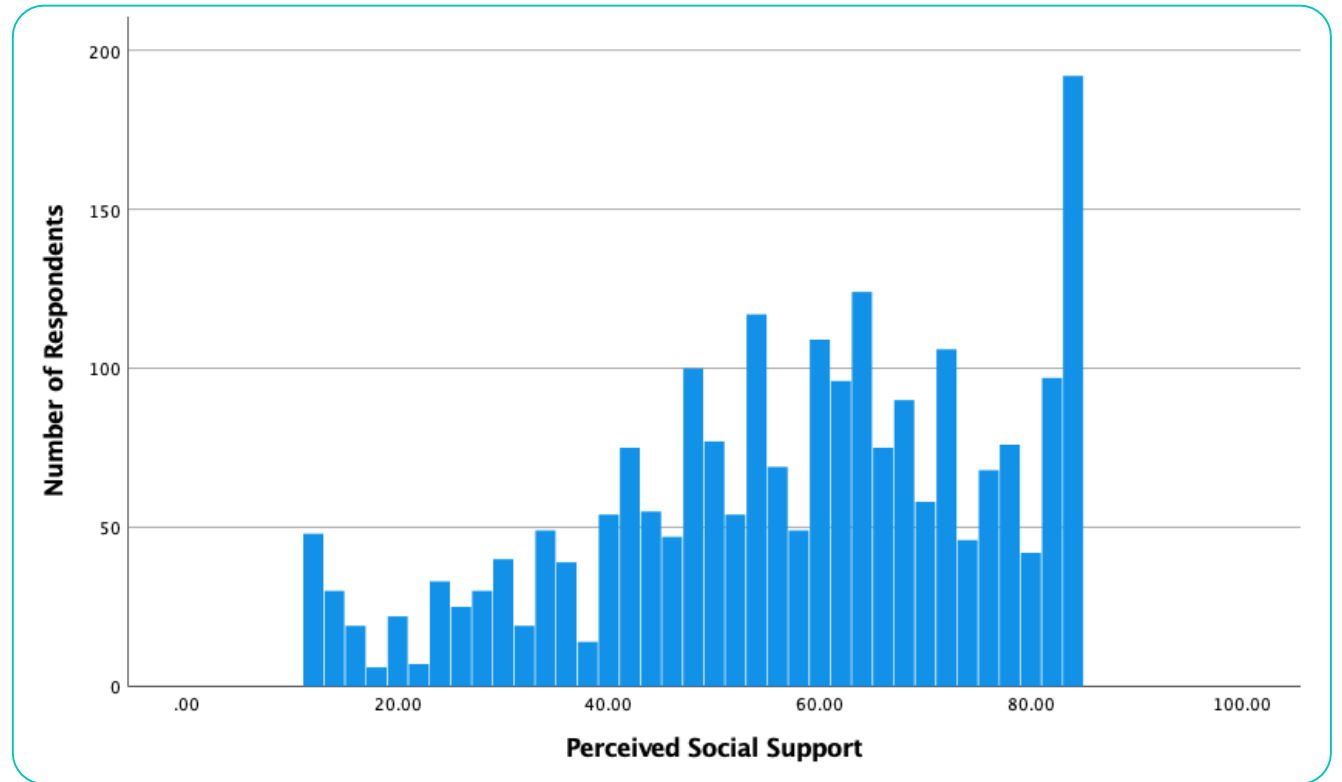
Sexuality

Sample Characteristics

N = 384	%	Mean (SD)	Min/Max
Age		37.9 (12.53)	19/81
No times in prison		6.7 (12.22)	1/180
White	89.3		
Born in Northern Ireland	79.9		
Working Class Background	64.8		
History of Drug & Alcohol Issues	75.5		
History of Mental Health Issues	69.5		
Remand	31.8		
Violent Crime	29.7		

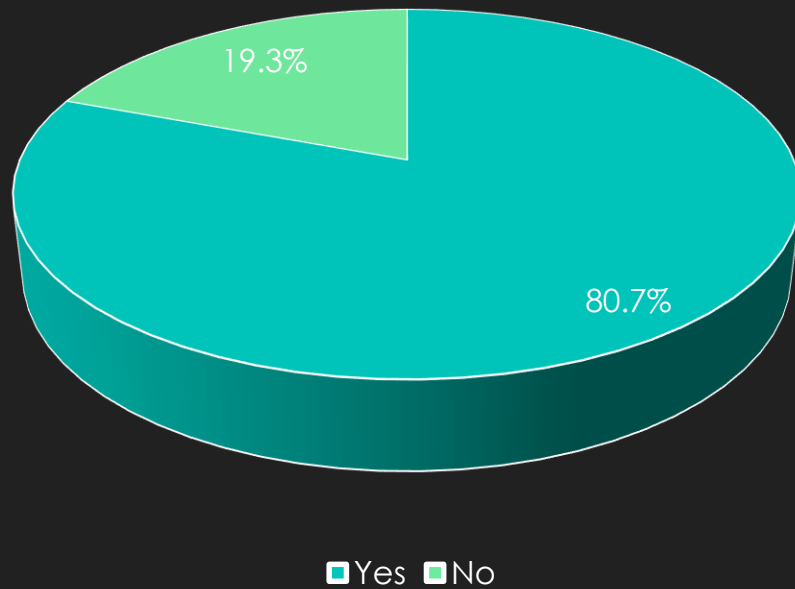
Perceived Social Support

Mean = 56.8
(n=384)



Trauma Prevalence

Experienced Trauma



Trauma Experiences by Subtype (n)

General Disaster

315

Physical & Sexual

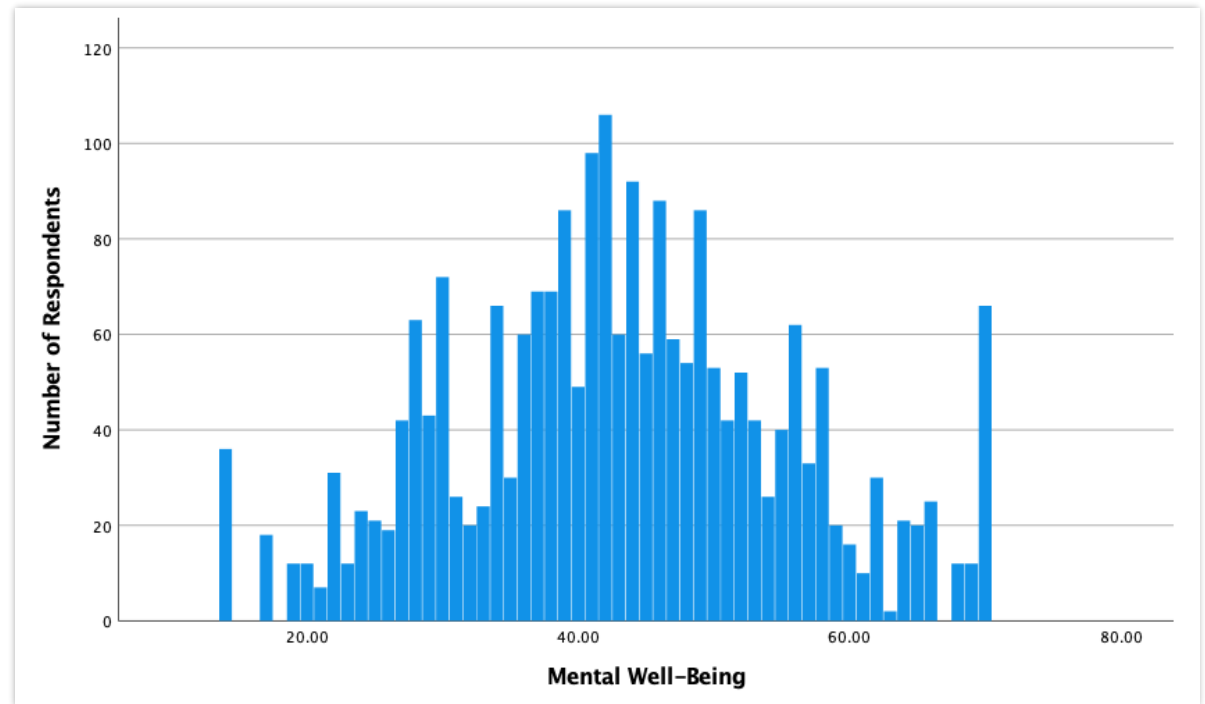
204

Crime Related

195

Mental Well-Being

Mean = 43.1 (n=384)



A dark, moody photograph of a person in silhouette, looking out through a grid of vertical and horizontal bars, likely a prison window. The person's head is bowed, and their hands are visible, resting on the bars. The background is a bright, overexposed area, possibly a sky or a wall, creating a strong contrast with the dark foreground.

Age

A close-up photograph of a person's hands gripping vertical metal bars, likely in a prison cell. The lighting is dim, and the focus is on the hands and the bars. The text 'Substance Use History' is overlaid in white.

Substance Use History

A person wearing a dark jacket and a backpack is walking away from the camera down a long, dimly lit corridor of an abandoned industrial building. The corridor is lined with large, weathered concrete pillars, many of which are covered in colorful graffiti. The floor is dark and cracked, and the ceiling is high with exposed pipes and wires. The overall atmosphere is gritty and somber.

Crime Related Trauma

A group of people, mostly men, are walking away from the camera in a dimly lit, industrial or institutional setting. The central figure is a man in a grey jacket, seen from behind. To his left, another man in a dark jacket stands near a wall. To his right, a group of other people are walking in the same direction. The background shows a large, open space with a high ceiling and some structural elements. The overall mood is somber and contemplative.

Trauma and Mental Wellbeing

A group of people, mostly men, are walking in a courtyard. They are wearing light blue short-sleeved shirts and bright green pants. They are walking from left to right. In the background is a large, multi-story brick building with many windows. Some windows have white bars. There is a white building with a dark doorway on the right side of the image. The text "Social Support from Friends and Mental Wellbeing" is overlaid in white on the left side of the image.

Social Support from Friends and Mental Wellbeing

Any questions

○ Feel free to email me: Daniel.mcfadden@mu.ie

References

- Berghuis, M., Palmen, H., Cochran, J. & Nieuwbeerta, P. 2022. Visitation Enablers and Barriers: Evaluating the Influences of Practical, Relational, and Experiential Factors on Visitation in Dutch Prisons. *Crime & Delinquency*, 00111287211061721.
- Cohen, S. & Wills, T. A. 1985. Stress, Social Support, and the Buffering Hypothesis. 310-357.
- Fahmy, C. 2021. First Weeks Out: Social Support Stability and Health among Formerly Incarcerated Men. *Soc Sci Med*, 282, 114141.
- Hanna, D., Dempster, M., Dyer, K., Lyons, E. & Devaney, L. 2012. Young People's Transgenerational Issues in Northern Ireland. Belfast, Northern Ireland: Queen's University Belfast.
- Hatch, V., Swerbenski, H. & Gray, S. A. O. 2020. Family Social Support Buffers the Intergenerational Association of Maternal Adverse Childhood Experiences and Preschoolers' Externalizing Behavior. *American Psychological Association* 489-501.
- Huey, M. P. & McNulty, T. L. 2005. Institutional Conditions and Prison Suicide: Conditional Effects of Deprivation and Overcrowding. *The Prison Journal*, 85, 490-514.
- Kao, J. C., Chuong, A., Reddy, M. K., Gobin, R. L., Zlotnick, C. & Johnson, J. E. 2014. Associations between Past Trauma, Current Social Support, and Loneliness in Incarcerated Populations. *Health & Justice*, 2, 7.

References

- MacDonald, M. 2018. Overcrowding and Its Impact on Prison Conditions and Health. *International Journal of Prisoner Health*.
- Maschi, T., Viola, D. & Morgen, K. 2013. Unraveling Trauma and Stress, Coping Resources, and Mental Well-Being among Older Adults in Prison: Empirical Evidence Linking Theory and Practice. *The Gerontologist*, 54, 857-867.
- Maycock, M. 2021. 'Covid-19 Has Caused a Dramatic Change to Prison Life'. Analysing the Impacts of the Covid-19 Pandemic on the Pains of Imprisonment in the Scottish Prison Estate. *The British Journal of Criminology*, azab031.
- Panagioti, M., Gooding, P. A., Taylor, P. J. & Tarrier, N. 2014. Perceived Social Support Buffers the Impact of Ptsd Symptoms on Suicidal Behavior: Implications into Suicide Resilience Research. *Comprehensive psychiatry*, 55, 104-112.
- Pettus-Davis, C. 2014. Social Support among Releasing Men Prisoners with Lifetime Trauma Experiences. *Int J Law Psychiatry*, 37, 512-23.
- Prati, G. & Pietrantonio, L. 2009. Optimism, Social Support, and Coping Strategies as Factors Contributing to Posttraumatic Growth: A Meta-Analysis. *Journal of Loss and Trauma*, 14, 364-388.
- Robinaugh, D.J., Marques, L., Traeger, L N., Marks, E.H., Sung, S.C, Gayle Beck, J., Pollack, M. H. & Simon, N. M. 2011. Understanding the Relationship of Perceived Social Support to Post-Trauma Cognitions and Posttraumatic Stress Disorder. *Journal of Anxiety Disorders*, 25, 1072-1078

References

- Rzeszutek, M., Oniszczenko, W., Żebrowska, M. & Firląg-Burkacka, E. 2015. Hiv Infection Duration, Social Support and the Level of Trauma Symptoms in a Sample of Hiv-Positive Polish Individuals. *AIDS Care*, 27, 363-369.
- Skarupski, K. A., Parisi, J. M., Thorpe, R., Tanner, E. & Gross, D. 2016. The Association of Adverse Childhood Experiences with Mid-Life Depressive Symptoms and Quality of Life among Incarcerated Males: Exploring Multiple Mediation. *Aging Ment Health*, 20, 655-666.
- Simon, N., Roberts, N. P., Lewis, C. E., van Gelderen, M. J. & Bisson, J. I. 2019. Associations between Perceived Social Support, Posttraumatic Stress Disorder (Ptsd) and Complex Ptsd (Cptsd): Implications for Treatment. *European Journal of Psychotraumatology*, 10, 1573129.
- Stephenson, T., Leaman, J., O'Moore, É., Tran, A. & Plugge, E. 2021. Time out of Cell and Time in Purposeful Activity and Adverse Mental Health Outcomes Amongst People in Prison: A Literature Review. *International Journal of Prisoner Health*, 17, 54-68.
- Sykes, G. 1958. *The Society of Captives: A Study of a Maximum Security Prison*, Princeton, Princeton University Press.
- Tedeschi, R. G., Park, C. L. & Calhoun, L. G. 1998. *Posttraumatic Growth: Positive Changes in the Aftermath of Crisis*, Routledge.
- User Voice 2022. *Coping with Covid in Prison: The Impact of the Prisoner Lockdown*. Belfast Queen's University Belfast
- Wang, J., Mann, F., Lloyd-Evans, B., Ma, R. & Johnson, S. 2018. Associations between Loneliness and Perceived Social Support and Outcomes of Mental Health Problems: A Systematic Review. *BMC Psychiatry*, 18, 156.
- Wolff, N. & Caravaca Sánchez, F. 2019. Associations among Psychological Distress, Adverse Childhood Experiences, Social Support, and Resilience in Incarcerate Men. *Criminal Justice and Behavior*, 46, 1630-1649.