

RESEARCH ROUND-UP:

Officer Safety Benefits of Free Communications

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When incarcerated people are able to regularly connect with their loved ones, they have more hope, engage in productive behavior, and participate more readily in rehabilitative programming, creating a safer and more positive prison environment for all. Many studies have found that more communication with loved ones decreases the rate of violent incidents in prison by roughly 20%.

Below are key findings from four separate studies on the topic:

- “If inmates made or received telephone calls... the odds of committing verbal or physical assaults against prison staff or other inmates decreased by 19.5%”¹
- “female inmates who called to or received calls from children decreased the expected rule violations rate by 27%... calls are equally important for male and female inmates.”²
- “Prisoners who received or made calls to their children were less likely to engage in rule violation and specifically violence.”³
- “We found that both female and male inmates *who ... had a higher number of phone calls* were less likely to commit prison infractions.”⁴

These research findings are backed up by testimonies from law enforcement stakeholders at jails, prisons, and correctional technology vendors.

- When California was considering making communication free in their prisons, the San Francisco Sheriff testified in favor of the bill. He said, “*It’s been almost two years since our calls were free here. It’s been a very positive change for everyone, our staff, our incarcerated, and their families. [Free phone calls] had a calming effect on the environment in our custodial facilities. And there’s been a decrease in some of the challenges that we’ve had in management of our population.*”⁵
- When Iowa DOC launched free video calling, Director Beth Skinner stated, “*Incarcerated people have something to look forward to with these video visits. I can even see it helping with disciplinary issues internally and potentially shifting our culture. I think it gives people hope.*”⁶
- Telio, a prison technology company also highlights how increased access to communication can reduce the presence of contraband in prisons. “*TELIO’s experience shows that increasing access to a managed telephony system and the resultant increase in communications is proven to reduce the demand for illegal mobile devices.*”⁷

¹ Solinas-Saunders, Monica, and Melissa J. Stacer. “Prison Resources and Physical/Verbal Assault in Prison: A Comparison of Male and Female Inmates.” *Victims & Offenders* 7, no. 3 (July 2012): 279–311. <https://doi.org/10.1080/15564886.2012.685218>.

² Jiang, Shanhe, and L. Thomas Winfree. “Social Support, Gender, and Inmate Adjustment to Prison Life: Insights From a National Sample.” *The Prison Journal* 86, no. 1 (2006): 32–55. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0032885505283876>.

³ Rocheleau, A. M. (2015). Ways of Coping and Involvement in Prison Violence. *International Journal of Offender Therapy and Comparative Criminology*, 59(4), 359–383. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0306624X13510275>

⁴ Celinska, Katarzyna, and Hung-En Sung. “Gender Differences in the Determinants of Prison Rule Violations.” *The Prison Journal* 94, no. 2 (2014): 220–41. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0032885514524882>.

⁵ <https://www.assembly.ca.gov/media/assembly-public-safety-committee-20220614>

⁶ <https://www.ameelio.org/states/iowa>

⁷ <https://justice-trends.press/communication-in-prisons-integral-solutions-to-tackle-complex-challenges/>