

The Impact of Child Welfare Legislation on Domestic Violence-related Homicide Rates

Gail Pacheco* and Kabir Dasgupta**

*Professor in Economics & Director, NZ Work Research Institute, Auckland University of Technology

**Research fellow, NZ Work Research Institute, Auckland University of Technology

Western Economic Association Conference
San Diego, June 28, 2017

Outline

- 1 Research Summary
- 2 Existing Literature
- 3 Data and Empirical Strategy
- 4 Results

Research Summary

- This paper analyzes whether state legislations that prohibit committing domestic violence in the physical presence of a child deter domestic violence-related homicides (child witness to DV law).
- The analysis explores exogenous variations across states and timing in implementation of the law in a difference-in-differences framework to identify the effects of the law.
- Primary search of state legislations to construct our explanatory variable.
- Implementation of child witness to DV law is negatively related to domestic violence-related homicide rates in general, but has no impact on marital violence.

Witnessing domestic violence

- Domestic violence is a large social and health concern in the United States.
- Recent estimates suggest that while 15.5 million children in the US witness acts of domestic violence every year, approximately 7 million children reside in households with severe domestic violence (**McDonald et al. 2006; DeBoard Lucas et al. 2011**).
- Common child outcomes associated with witnessing domestic violence include various emotional and behavioral problems and mental health-related disorders (**Kolbo et al. 1996; Edleson 1999; Kitzmann et al. 2003**).

Child witness to DV law (CWIG 2016)

- 25 states (including Puerto Rico) have introduced legal provisions that prohibit acts of domestic violence in physical presence of a child during the period 1993-2012.
- The law can be broadly classified under two categories-
 - (i) Defining circumstances under which witnessing domestic violence by a child occurs.
 - (ii) Punitive measures to be taken against offenders who commit domestic violence in presence of a child (explanatory variable in main analysis).
 - Punitive measures include financial penalty, community services, and incarceration (punishments vary by the graveness of incidents).

Punitive measures in domestic violence - Potential effects

Existing theories:

- Minneapolis Domestic Violence Experiment (1982) - Randomized experiment showed that arresting a domestic violence abuser reduces future risk of subsequent violence.
- Iyengar (2009) -
 - Strict arrest law for domestic violence (mandatory arrests) appear to increase intimate partner homicide rates - potentially due to reduction in *reporting* from victims and risks of *reprisal* from offenders.
 - Strict arrest laws are negatively related to child homicide rates and homicide rates for other family relationships - potentially due to increase in third party reporting (teachers, neighbors, and other adult members) and fear of losing child's custodial rights.

Child witness to DV law and DV-related homicides- Information

- CWIG (2016) provides state-specific statutes that define circumstances under which a child witnesses domestic violence and incorporates punitive measures for domestic violence in presence of our child.
- We use the state-specific statutes to perform our review of annual state legislations in HeinOnline and Lexis Nexis databases by which we identify the years of passage of the law.
- Using victim-offender relationships and victims' age in UCR's Supplementary Homicide Reports, we create five outcomes of domestic violence-related homicides.

Dependent variables and other information

- Domestic violence-related homicide rates -
 - Two broad measures (all possible DV relationships) - Overall and youth (aged under 20) victimization.
 - Two narrower measures (using Iyengar's (2009) definition) - Family and youth victimization.
 - One measure of marital violence (current spouses).
- Annual state-level controls-
 - Policies - Warrantless arrest laws for domestic violence (Iyengar 2009; Zeoli et al 2011), cigarette tax, and beer tax.
 - Education & crime information - High-school dropout rate, violent crime rates and arrest rates for violence family and children.
 - Economic & demographic indicators - Seasonally adjusted unemployment rates and per-capita personal income, proportions of male, White, Hispanic, and adult population.

Empirical Strategy

- We perform OLS (Poisson for further robustness) regressions for using four specifications ranging from a baseline model to a saturated model.

- In the baseline model, we estimate:

$$DV_{st} = \alpha_0 + \alpha_1(Law_{st}) + \gamma_s + \lambda_t + \epsilon_{st} \quad (1)$$

- In the most saturated model, we estimate:

$$DV_{st} = \beta_0 + \beta_1(Law_{st}) + P'_{st}\beta_2 + Z'_{st}\beta_3 + \theta_1\delta_{st} + \theta_2(\delta_{st} * Law_{st}) + \gamma_s + \lambda_t + v_{st} \quad (2)$$

- We perform a parameterized event study for policy endogeneity (Granger causality) and address omitted variable bias in the most saturated model.
- β_1 estimates the impact of child witness to DV law on DV-related homicide rates.

OLS regression coefficients

Table: Effects of child witness to DV law

	Adult homicide rate	Youth homicide rate	lyengars measure- Family homicide rate	lyengars measure- Youth homicide rate	Marital homicide rate
Legal consequences for domestic violence offence in presence of a child					
Law	-0.191** (0.099)	-0.133** (0.061)	-0.198*** (0.073)	-0.093** (0.047)	-0.008 (0.069)
Legal provisions for circumstances of witnessing domestic violence					
Law	-0.145* (0.084)	-0.066 (0.061)	-0.239*** (0.079)	-0.127** (0.046)	0.011 (0.059)

Main findings - Summary

- Implementation of child witness to DV law leads to a drop in the adult victimization rate by 0.19 per 100,000 inhabitants and in youth victimization rate by 0.13 per 100,000 inhabitants.
- We find similar relationships when we look at narrower measures of DV-related homicides (Iyengar 2009).
- The law has no impact on marital violence.
- Results are qualitatively similar in count models.

Concluding Remarks

- Results indicate that deterrent impact of the law (possibly due to altruistic ties) might dominate risk of reprisal and reduction in reporting commonly associated with strict domestic violence measures.
- In marital violence, risk of reprisal or non-reporting might be stronger as found in case of intimate partner violence by Iyengar (2009).
- This is the first study to evaluate domestic violence-related child welfare legislation on domestic violence.
- Results have important policy implications and open scope for future research in related fields.

Thank You!!

Thank you very much for your time!!