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

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Outline

1. Research Summary
2. Existing Literature
3. Data and Empirical Strategy
4. Results
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).
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 martial violence (current spouses).

- **Annual state-level controls** -
  - 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:

\[ DV_{st} = \beta_0 + \beta_1(Law_{st}) + P'_{st}\beta_2 + Z'_{st}\beta_3 + \theta_1\delta_{st} + \theta_2(\delta_{st} \ast Law_{st}) + \gamma_s + \lambda_t + \nu_{st} \quad (2) \]

- We perform a parameterized event study for policy endogeneity (Granger causality) and address omitted variable bias in the most saturated model.
- \( \beta_1 \) 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

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Adult homicide rate</th>
<th>Youth homicide rate</th>
<th>Iyengar's measure - Family homicide rate</th>
<th>Iyengar's measure - Youth homicide rate</th>
<th>Marital homicide rate</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Legal consequences for domestic violence offence in presence of a child</td>
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<tr>
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<td>-0.198***</td>
<td>-0.093**</td>
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<td>(0.073)</td>
<td>(0.047)</td>
<td>(0.069)</td>
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<td>Legal provisions for circumstances of witnessing domestic violence</td>
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<tr>
<td>Law</td>
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<td></td>
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<td>(0.061)</td>
<td>(0.079)</td>
<td>(0.046)</td>
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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 very much for your time!!