

LIBRARIES FIGHTING CRIME:
EVIDENCE FROM A NATURAL EXPERIMENT

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ABSTRACT

I estimate the impact of library hours on local crime rates, exploiting variation in Los Angeles Public Library hours. Local institutions such as libraries cause criminal spillover effects from three mechanisms. Libraries attract people who could become victims as well as people who become “eyes upon the street” deterring crime. Also, local institutions like libraries are used by everyone but their loss is disproportionately felt by the historically disadvantaged, minorities, and the poor. The historically disadvantaged are more likely to become a victim of crime or become arrested. Therefore, when libraries are closed, many criminally risky and at risk persons will be out on the streets. Utilizing a natural experiment which varied library hours due to budget cuts and restorations in Los Angeles city library from January 2009 to September 2011, this paper estimates difference in differences effects of changes in library hours in areas close to libraries on daily crime rates. I find statistically significant negative effects of daily library hours on car burglary rates. For areas with high levels of violent crime, I find statistically significant negative effects of daily library hours on aggravated assault and homicide rates.