What Kind of Emergency Response Is Best? Examining the Impacts of Police and Alternative Responses*

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Abstract

Cities across America are adopting civilian crisis response programs as alternatives to traditional policing, yet causal evidence on their impact and cost-effectiveness is scarce. This paper evaluates Durham, North Carolina's HEART program, which diverts nonviolent 911 calls from police. Using a difference-in-differences design, we find that HEART reduces crime reports, arrests, and response times—primarily through civilian phone and in-person responses, rather than police–civilian co-responses. The program increases future 911 calls, which suggests it fosters public trust. Based on an original contingent valuation survey and applying the marginal value of public funds framework, we conclude that HEART is a fiscally self-sustainable intervention.

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