

Comments on:
The Economics of Rape

Daniel L. Chen

Question

- Does increasing the cost of reporting rape reduce the number of rapes reported?
- Policy change in Wasilla, Alaska
 - 1997: Impose costs of medical rape kits on women
 - 2000: State law forbids this, but police chief publicly opposes the state policy
 - 2001: new police chief
- Claim: Imposing the \$1200 cost reduces rape reports by 50-80%

Motivation

- De Jure: On the Books
- De Facto: In reality
 - What happened to the cost of medical kits during the police chief's public opposition? It sounds like the state law still applied.

Theory

- Total Cost of each reported rape is increasing in the fraction of rapes reported
 - Why aren't there returns to scale?
 - Marginal costs could decline if you give multiple offenders the incentive to rat each other out.
- Victim's benefit curve
 - Only victim's rapist has social returns greater than private returns
 - Other rapists (the remaining fraction) should have equal social and private returns for non-victims

Data

- R = number of rapes
- V = % reported
- C = % confirmed
- Argues: Ratio of Rapes to Other Crimes is stable
 - So data focuses on ratios of $V * C$
- But are relative ratios of % confirmed also stable?
 - Argues: control for clearance (i.e. solve)
 - But what if police don't bother confirming?

Results

- Data tells us about VC but paper and model are set up as being about V
- Police attitude is constant from 1997 onwards and financial costs of reporting were high only in 1997-2000, so the reduction in rape reporting rate (VC) after 2000 is puzzling
- DD inference comes mainly from control states moving anomalously
- Paper examines level differences in Wasilla pre-treatment, but what about trend differences?

Policy

- The socially efficient use of this procedure will occur when the State, the party who is the primary beneficiary of the procedure, also bears the primary burden of the procedure
 - The estimates of social costs come from housing prices. Does this mean home owners should bear the costs? Richer home owners?