

The Effects of Youth Employment on Crime: Evidence from New York City Lotteries

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Abstract

Recent policy discussions have highlighted proposals for government-guaranteed jobs. One of the key potential benefits of youth employment programs in particular is a reduction in criminal activity. Prior work on summer youth programs has documented little-to-no effect of the program on crime during the program, but has found longer-term effects driven primarily by violent crime or other serious crimes among "at-risk" youth. We enrich this picture by studying randomized lotteries for access to the New York City (NYC) Summer Youth Employment Program (SYEP), the largest summer youth employment program in the United States, by merging SYEP administrative data on 294,100 lottery participants to New York State criminal records data. SYEP causes a decrease in arrests during the program months itself, including among the youth who we do not label as "at-risk," neither of which has been seen previously in the literature. We replicate longer-term effects on youth for serious arrests, but only for "at-risk" youth. Overall, we conclude that SYEP may help put "at-risk" youth on a safer long-term path while simultaneously having an incapacitation effect on the broader youth population, keeping them "out of trouble" during the summer months as we are able to observe using the statistical power afforded by our large dataset.

Full draft coming soon. This article does not necessarily reflect the views of the U.S. Treasury.