

MY457: Seminar 1 Guiding Questions

2026-01-27

Paper:

Paper: Pager, D., Goldstein, R., Ho, H. and Western, B., 2022. Criminalizing poverty: The consequences of court fees in a randomized experiment. *American Sociological Review*, 87(3), pp.529-553.

Guiding Questions:

1. General

- What is the purpose/relevance of this study? What is the precise causal question the authors try to answer? How well does this map to their theory of interest?
- Why do the authors conduct an experiment? Or put differently: Why can we not just collect a representative sample of court fees and various outcome measures, and analyze that data?

2. Measurement and design

- What is the treatment? What is the outcome (variable)? Do the authors measure any covariates? Are they pre-treatment, post-treatment, or something else?
- Can you write down the ATE (estimand)? Do you think in this case it would be different from the ATT (estimand), or not? Why?
- What is the unit of analysis? What are observations in the authors' data?
- What is the level of treatment assignment?

3. Internal validity

- How would you assess whether the field experiment is (likely to be) internally valid? Do the authors provide supporting tests for the identifying assumption(s)?
- Do you have any key concerns about the internal validity of this experiment?
- Do the authors remove some observations? If so, why? If not, would you recommend doing so?
- Do the authors study one time period, or many? What implications does this happen?

4. Heterogeneity, and external validity

- Which heterogeneous effects do the authors examine? Which other ones would you have assessed?
- How do the authors test heterogeneous effects? Are these appropriate? How else could they have done them?
- Do you have any concerns about the external validity of the study? Why, or why not?

5. Extensions

- Suppose you wanted to extend and improve the authors' study using a new randomized experiment. What would you change?
- Suppose you wanted to see if the authors' findings operate outside of an experimental intervention. How would you use observational data to test this?