

Jillian B. Carr – Research Statement

My research is concentrated in two critical areas in modern US policy: poverty and crime. The other important constant in my research is high-quality, clean empirical reduced form design. My commitment to causal inference in policy-relevant work is driven by my research philosophy - policy recommendations from academia are necessary and must be supported by clear, strong causal evidence.

I initially became interested in poverty and crime while living in Memphis when I attended Rhodes College for my undergraduate degree. At that time, it had one of the highest per capita murder rates in the U.S. Searching for explanations, the media latched onto the idea that public housing demolitions (and the resulting dispersion of residents) were to blame. I found their evidence flimsy and thought that an economist could answer that question more convincingly. Although I have not tackled that particular question, it is what inspired me to consider the role that resource scarcity and government attempts to alleviate it play in public safety and health.

My recent work on the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP, formerly “Food Stamps”) falls squarely within these areas of concentration. My publication “SNAP Benefits and Crime: Evidence from Changing Disbursement Schedules,” with Analisa Packham, Assistant Professor at Vanderbilt University, was published in the *Review of Economics and Statistics* in 2019. Leveraging state-level changes to disbursement schedules, we show that transitioning to a more dispersed schedule (with more payment dates, although still only one monthly payment per household) leads to less crime at grocery stores, especially theft. Indiana schedules disbursement by first letter of last name, so we are also able to compare arrest rates of individuals across times of scarcity and plenty within a month. We find that women are the most sensitive to these pay cycles and are more likely to commit theft (that leads to conviction) just before their payment date - when scarcity is greatest. This work was the first of a set of projects that Analisa and I undertook examining the impacts of SNAP payment schedules on low income communities.

Our second paper on SNAP disbursement looks specifically at the impacts of benefit disbursement on domestic violence and child abuse. “SNAP Schedules and Domestic Violence” was published in the *Journal of Policy Analysis and Management* in early 2021. In this work, we examine the impact of a state’s transition to a more dispersed SNAP schedule on reported domestic violence and child abuse.

Most recently, Analisa and I also worked with Timothy Bond, Associate Professor at Purdue University, and Jonathan Smith, Assistant Professor at Georgia State University, to study the impacts of taking the SAT exam while experiencing scarcity caused by SNAP payment cycles. This paper, “Hungry for Success? SNAP Timing, High-Stakes Exam Performance and College Attendance,” was recently conditionally accepted at the *American Economic Journal: Economic Policy*. We find that students who take the exam during the latter half of the payment cycle, when many families report experiencing nutritional scarcity, score lower on the SAT and are less likely to attend a 4-year college.

My work on housing vouchers is another clear example of the interaction of crime and poverty as well. “Housing Vouchers, Income Shocks and Crime: Evidence from a Lottery” with Vijetha Koppa, Assistant Professor at the Institute of Management Technology in Dubai, was published in 2020 in the *Journal of Economic Behavior and Organization*. We use administrative data from the Houston Housing Authority and the Houston Police Department to study the effects of Section 8 housing vouchers on arrests.

This year I also leveraged my knowledge of data from the city of Chicago to write a paper about domestic violence during the COVID-19 pandemic. Lindsey Bullinger, Assistant Professor at Georgia Tech University, Analisa Packham, and I wrote “COVID-19 and Crime: Effects of Stay-at-Home Orders on Domestic Violence,” which is forthcoming at the *American Journal of Health Economics*. While there are many papers that show that 911 calls to report domestic violence skyrocketed during stay-at-home orders, we believe that we were the first to show that official reports of said violence fell, as did arrests. We think that this points towards an important space for improvement in how we respond to such emergencies, as we show that victims were likely experiencing more abuse, but able to receive less assistance.

Gun violence is another important strand of my research agenda that disproportionately impacts low-income communities. With Jennifer Doleac, Associate Professor at Texas A&M University, I published “Keep the Kids Inside? Juvenile Curfews and Urban Gun Violence” in the *Review of Economics and Statistics* in 2017. In this paper, we used data from gunshot-detection audio sensors to determine whether gunshot patterns changed when Washington D.C. changed its youth curfew. Because these data are so novel, we also released a descriptive study on the underreporting of gun crime as a Brookings Research Paper, which has gleaned considerable attention. In the last year, I also produced a report for the Policing Project, a research initiative at New York University Law School, detailing the impacts of installing the same gunshot-detection technology (called “ShotSpotter”) in a jurisdiction.

I’m currently working on some projects that address some more fundamental issues in our criminal justice landscape. One project addresses the impact of elected judges on criminal court outcomes and bias, and another work in progress deals with the relationship between gun prevalence and adverse outcomes. I see myself continuing to work on important questions about how we improve public safety and health through policy-making.

Because poverty and crime often affect the same communities, I see this dual agenda as also taking a somewhat more comprehensive approach to helping low-income communities. To that end, I see the work that I do as socially important. I’ve made considerable effort to use the information dissemination tools of the modern academic to publicize this work, too. I’m active on twitter, which I’ve learned is an important way to be a part of important discussions happening in policy arenas. My work has been discussed in various news outlets as well, and I’ve had numerous opportunities to talk to state lawmakers in Indiana.