

Local Immigration Enforcement and Domestic Violence*

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Abstract

Every third woman in the U.S. experiences violence from an intimate partner during her lifetime. Many never seek help. Immigrants, especially if undocumented, are less likely to seek help than non-immigrants. The increase in immigration enforcement through local police force may exacerbate this problem by increasing a victim's fear of deportation. I estimate the effect of local immigration enforcement on domestic violence victims' help-seeking behavior. I use a fixed effects model, a generalized synthetic control method and novel administrative data on the use of services for domestic violence victims in North Carolina. In North Carolina, a large fraction of individuals of Hispanic origin are either undocumented immigrants or are connected to undocumented immigrants. I use Hispanic origin as a proxy for immigration status, lack of documentation and connections to undocumented immigrants. Local immigration enforcement significantly reduces Hispanics' service use. It does not affect service use by African Americans or Whites, two predominantly US-born groups. This suggests that the decrease in service use is directly related to immigration status and not driven by a general effect on minorities. Using intimate partner homicide as a measure of intimate partner violence, I explore if the reduction in service use reflects a reduction in intimate partner violence. I do not find any robust evidence that local immigration enforcement affects intimate partner homicides of Hispanic women.

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