

THE EFFECT OF YOUTH CLUBS ON EDUCATION AND CRIME

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July 16, 2024

Abstract

Youth clubs are community-based after-school programs, typically offered free of charge to teenagers in underprivileged neighbourhoods. I provide the first causal estimates of their effects on education and crime by leveraging quasi-experimental variation from austerity-related cuts which led to the closure of 30% of the youth clubs that were open as of 2010 in London. I use difference-in-differences research designs and administrative data to compare residents of areas near closed clubs to residents of areas where clubs remained open. Teenagers affected perform worse in national high school exams after closures, and the effects are much larger for lower-income youths who also become more likely to be excluded and suspended from school. Youth offending rates in areas affected increases by 15%, and these effects are not explained by changes in policing intensity, nor by general austerity. These programs appear to complement formal education and to have a crime-reducing effect beyond short-term incapacitation through the provision of unique resources devoted to young people, and by supporting lower-income youths specifically.

JEL Codes: H72, I38, J13, J24, K14, K42.

*I would like to thank Manuel Bagues, Mirko Draca, Marta Santamaria, and Jeff Grogger for their generous guidance in this project. This paper has also benefited from suggestions from Ashna Arora, Chris Blattman, Elena Casanovas, SeeYu Chan, Nikhil Datta, Gaia Dossi, Elisa Facchetti, Immanuel Feld, Ludovica Gasse, Daniela Horta Saenz, James Heckman, Dmitri Koustas, Amrita Kulka, Yuchen Lin, Matt Lowe, John MacDonald, Angelica Martinez-Leyva, Clara Martinez-Toledano, Jose Montalban Castilla, Akash Raja, Evan Rose, Bruno Santos de Souza, Edoardo Tolva, Ao Wang, Natalia Zinovyeva, and seminar participants at various conferences and workshops. I learnt enormously about youth work from informal conversations with youth workers, young people, London Youth, UK Youth, YMCA, the National Youth Agency, Naomi Thompson, and Christian M. White. Special thanks to the London Metropolitan Police for allowing the use of their data, making this project possible. Some of this work was undertaken in the Office for National Statistics Secure Research Service using data from ONS and other owners. The views and conclusions expressed in this paper do not reflect the opinions or endorsement of the Metropolitan Police, the ONS or any other data owners. Earlier versions of this work were titled “The Impact of Youth Centres on Crime” and “After School Activities and Crime: Evidence from London’s Youth Clubs”. All errors are my own.