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STAY AT HOME IF YOU CAN: COVID-19 STAY-AT-HOME GUIDELINES AND LOCAL CRIME

ABSTRACT

Government responses to the COVID-19 pandemic had an unprecedented impact on mobility patterns with implications for public safety and crime dynamics in countries across the planet. This paper explores the effect of stay-at-home guidelines on thefts and robberies at the neighborhood level in a Latin American city. We exploit neighborhood heterogeneity in the ability of working adults to comply with stay-at-home recommendations and use difference-in-differences and event-study designs to identify the causal effect of COVID-19 mobility restrictions on the monthly number of thefts and robberies reported to police across neighborhoods in Montevideo (Uruguay) in 2020. Our results show that neighborhoods with a higher share of residents with work-from-home jobs experienced a larger reduction in reported thefts in relation to neighborhoods with a lower share of residents with work-from-home jobs. In contrast, both groups of neighborhoods experienced a similar reduction in the number of reported robberies. These findings cast light on opportunity structures for crime but also on how crime during the pandemic has disproportionately affected more vulnerable areas and households.

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