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LOCAL LABOR MARKETS AND CRIMINAL RECIDIVISM

Crystal S. Yang*

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Abstract

This paper estimates the impact of local labor market conditions on criminal recidivism using administrative prison records on four million offenders released from 43 states between 2000 and 2013. Exploiting the timing of each offender's release from prison, I find that being released to a county with higher low-skilled wages significantly decreases the risk of recidivism. The impact of higher wages on recidivism is larger for both black offenders and first-time offenders, and in sectors that report being more willing to hire ex-offenders. These results are robust to individual- and county-level controls, such as policing and corrections activity, and do not appear to be driven by changes in the composition of released offenders during good or bad economic times.

JEL Codes: J23, K14, K40

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