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Nadia Campaniello, Evelina Gavrilova

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Uncovering the Gender Participation Gap in Crime

Nadia Campaniello*

Evelina Gavrilova[†]

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Abstract

There is little research on the gender variation in the crime market. We document a gender gap in criminal activities, based on property crimes, using data from the U.S. National Incident Based Reporting System from 1995 to 2015. We show that there is a gender participation gap, with only 30 percent of the crimes being committed by females. We try to explain the gender participation gap by focusing on incentives to commit crime, such as criminal earnings and probability of arrest. We show that on average females earn 13 percent less than males while they face a 9 percent lower likelihood of arrest. We find that males respond more to changes in illegal earnings, with an elasticity of 0.36, while females are less responsive with an elasticity of 0.23. Both genders respond equally to changes in the probability of arrest, with an elasticity around -0.14. Using a Blinder-Oaxaca type decomposition technique, we find that differences in incentives explain about 8 percent of the gender participation gap, while differences in responsiveness to changes in incentives, especially illegal earnings, explain about 56 percent of the gap. The fact that females behave differently than males has implications for the heterogeneity in response to crime control policies.

Keywords: Gender Gap in Crime, Crime Incentives, Synthetic panel

JEL Classification: J16, K42

*Corresponding author, University of Essex and IZA, ncampa@essex.ac.uk, Wivenhoe Park, CO4 3SQ Colchester, UK

[†]NHH Norwegian School of Economics and Norwegian Center for Taxation, evelina.gavrilova@nhh.no, Norwegian School of Economics, Helleveien 30, 5045 Bergen, NO

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