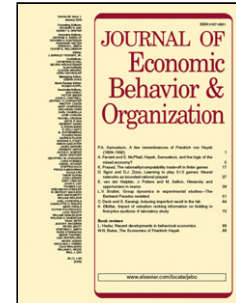


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Authors: Rafael Di Tella, Lucía Freira, Ramiro H. Gálvez, Ernesto Schargrotsky, Diego Shalom, Mariano Sigman



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# Crime and Violence: Desensitization in Victims to Watching Criminal Events\*

Rafael Di Tella

*Harvard Business School, CifAR & NBER*

Lucía Freira

*Universidad Torcuato Di Tella*

Ramiro H. Gálvez

*Universidad Torcuato Di Tella & ICC-CONICET*

Ernesto Schargrotsky

*Universidad Torcuato Di Tella & CONICET*

Diego Shalom

*Universidad Torcuato Di Tella & CONICET*

Mariano Sigman

*Universidad Torcuato Di Tella & CONICET*

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## Abstract

We study desensitization to crime in a lab experiment by showing footage of criminal acts to a group of subjects, some of whom have been previously victimized. We measure biological markers of stress and behavioral indices of cognitive control before and after treated participants watch a series of real, crime-related videos (while the control group watches non-crime-related videos). Not previously victimized participants exposed to the treatment video show significant changes in cortisol level, heart rate, and measures of cognitive control. Instead, previously victimized individuals who are exposed to the treatment video show biological markers and cognitive performance comparable to those measured in individuals exposed to the control video. These results suggest a phenomenon of desensitization or habituation of victims to crime exposure.

*JEL codes:* K42

*Keywords:* crime, biological markers, experiment, victimization, desensitization

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\* Corresponding author: Ernesto Schargrotsky, Universidad Torcuato Di Tella, Av. Figueroa Alcorta 7350, (C1428BIJ) Buenos Aires, Argentina, [eschargr@utdt.edu](mailto:eschargr@utdt.edu). We thank the InterAmerican Development Bank for financial support. We thank participants at LACEA 2015, the 7th Transatlantic Crime Workshop, AL CAPONE 2016, IEA 2017, and several workshops for their helpful comments.

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