

The Causal Effect of Military Conscription on Crime and the Labor Market

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Abstract: We identify the causal effect of mandatory peacetime military conscription on crime and labor market outcomes of Swedish males born in the 1970s and 1980s, taking advantage of the exogenous variation in the chance of service resulting from randomly assigned draft board officers. Service significantly increases post-service crime, especially for relatively disadvantaged males with pre-service criminal history or low socioeconomic status. Similarly heterogeneous results are seen for labor market outcomes. We also provide the first clean evidence that conscription contemporaneously incapacitates crime. Finally, we highlight the role that peer effects may play in explaining the unintended negative impacts of service.