

## The Impact of Legalized Abortion on Crime

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Decrease in criminality in the US in the 1990s. Several explanations have been discussed, such as increased imprisonment, larger police force and other preventive actions. However, also areas where the police force has not increased (such as L.A) have also experienced a drop in criminality. Same problem for the explanation of decreased use of crack cocaine: also in areas where the usage has not decreased has experienced a drop in criminality.

1973 there was a famous decision in the New York State Supreme court on abortion: Roe v. Wade. This decision legalized abortions. Seven years after Roe v. Wade the annual number of abortions was around 1.6 million.

Abortions may affect criminality in two ways:

1. Smaller cohort sizes. When a small cohort reaches the high crime ages at age around 20, criminality will decrease.
2. Children born after legalization of abortion may on average have lower subsequent rates of criminality for either of two reasons:
  - Women who have abortions are most at risk to give birth to children who subsequently will engage in criminal activities. Teenagers, unmarried women, and the economically disadvantaged are more likely seek abortion.
  - Women may use abortion to optimize timing of birth.

Both these reasons are related to parental spending on children, what Becker denotes “child quality”.

Hypothesis of the paper: the decreased criminality rate in the 1990s can be explained by the increase in abortions in the 1970s.

Empirical Analysis:

1. *National time trends*. Break in the trend is consistent with the increase in abortions 20 years before.
2. Comparing time trends in early legalizing states with others. Alaska, California, Hawaii, New York and Washington legalized or quasi-legalized abortion already in 1970 and the other states in 1973.
3. State-Level changes in crime as a function of post-legalization abortion rates.