

The Effects of Eviction on Children

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Abstract

Eviction and housing instability may be important channels for the intergenerational transmission of poverty, and the potential effects of eviction on children are often raised as a rationale for tenant protection policies. Studying the effects of eviction on children is challenging because of a lack of individual-level data and because eviction is correlated with other sources of economic distress. We assemble new data sets linking eviction court records in Chicago and New York to administrative public-school records and restricted Census records to study the impact of eviction on children's home and schooling environments, and on their academic achievement. To disentangle effects of eviction from correlated sources of economic distress, we use a research design based on quasi-random assignment of court cases to judges who vary in their leniency. We find an impact on applications for homeless shelter in New York and Chicago. Our causal estimates using Census data suggest economically meaningful impacts on living arrangements, including impacts on doubling up and the likelihood of living with grandparents, but we find no evidence that eviction impacts family structure or neighborhood quality. In terms of academic success, we find that an eviction order impacts the likelihood that a student switches schools and has a moderate impact on school absences, and negatively impacts course credit completion for high-school aged students. But we do not find a significant impact on a student's school quality and we can rule out negative effects on test scores. Our results offer a comprehensive characterization of children facing eviction across multiple domains of a child's life, and new causal estimates that advance our understanding of the social costs of eviction.