

Original Paper

Citizens with More Educational Experience are Less Likely to Engage in Illegal and Criminal Activities

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Abstract

Multitudinous factors cause crime engagement to decrease. However, policymakers are paying increasing attention to education as the key strategy to combat crimes. Therefore, this essay argues that citizens with more educational experience are less likely to engage in illegal and criminal activities. In the form of a literature review, there are three claims proposed which supported by an abundance of relevant evidence. Firstly, education is conducive to employment, thereby reducing the crime rate. Secondly, education inhibits citizens' desire to engage in delinquency. Thirdly, schools prevent young people from committing crimes. In addition, prior researchers also put forward a main counterargument that education may have a light risk of promoting crime. Combining these three claims and refutation, this essay concluded that more educational experience is beneficial to efforts to reduce engagement in illegal and criminal activities, but not absolute. Moreover, I also proposed some personal recommendations to policymakers and researchers.

Keywords

policymaker, education, crime

1. Introduction

In terms of the measure of reducing illegal activity occurrence, a large number of previous or current researchers (e.g., Kuo & Sullivan, 2001; Weisburd & Eck, 2004; Buonanno, Montolio, & Vanin, 2009) have shown different perspectives. Kuo and Sullivan (2001) considered that residents living in more vegetation environments have lower fear levels because there are fewer uncivilised, aggressive and violent crimes. Weisburd and Eck (2004) asserted that problem-oriented police effectively reduce delinquency. Buonanno, Montolio and Vanin (2009) concluded that citizen norms and internet networks significantly positively impact the reduction of property crime rate. Bennett, Holloway and Farrington (2006) suggested that neighbourhood supervision is valid evidence for falling offences. Another

popular policy to fight crime is based on interventions with more severe penalties and punishments (Fella & Gallipoli, 2014). However, growing international evidence indicates that policies designed to increase academic attainment and improve school quality can significantly reduce crime rates (Hjalmarsson & Lochner, 2012). Similarly, Bell, Costa and Machin's (2016) research discovered that compulsory education significantly decreases crime. For example, the line chart in Figure 1 clearly describes the relationship between imprisonment and years of schooling. As shown, with the growth of receiving educational experience, the likelihood of citizens being arrested gradually drops. Referring to the aforementioned background, my position in this essay is citizens with more educational experience are less likely to engage in illegal and criminal activities. The main debate against this argument is that the possibility of employees participating in economic crimes increases with their education level growth. Therefore, to sustain my position, the main body part consists of three claims, each of which is supported by two pieces of evidence. At the end of this assignment, the conclusions will be drawn based on the evidence presented in the literature review, before illustrating some further considerations.

1.1 Figures



Figure 1. The Relevance between Imprisonment Possibility and Year of Education

Source: Lochner, 2011

2. Claim 1: Higher Education Degree Leads to Better Employment, Thereby Decreasing the Crime Rate

2.1 Evidence 1

Education leads to employment opportunities for citizens, which contributes to a reduction in participation in illegal activities. Firstly, the prerequisite for falling civilians' crime probability is that education creates better civilian recruitment opportunities. Many studies (e.g., O'Higgins & Ivanov, 2006; Fella & Gallipoli, 2014; Lochner, 2010) have proven the causal relationship between schooling and employment. As O'Higgins and Ivanov (2006) admit, access to education guarantees successful employment prospects. Additionally, a more extended schooling period improves people's future employment (Fella & Gallipoli, 2014; Lochner, 2010; Hjalmarsson & Lochner, 2012; Machin, Vujčić, &

Marie, 2012). By comparison, students who drop out of school are unlikely to have better work chances (Christle, Jolivet, & Nelson, 2007). Fella and Gallipoli (2014) asserted that, with the increase in education level, high school learners' social skills composition is upgraded. Similarly, Hjalmarsson and Lochner (2012) also claimed that youths' labour market skills benefit from the education process in institutions. Consequently, education contributes to more employment opportunities because employers expect to offer educated and skilled personnel for their enterprise in the fast-growing global economy (Brown & Lauder, 1992). Secondly, numerous existing studies (e.g. Lochner, 2010; Lochner, 2020; Machin, Vujic, & Marie, 2012) demonstrate that citizens with jobs are less likely to engage in criminal activities. According to Lochner's (2010) statement, providing young people with worthwhile employment opportunities can effectively prevent their option of criminal life. Equally, employment makes people spend more time crime-free in the community (Tripodi et al., 2010). By contrast, Raphael and Winter-Ebmer (2001) highlighted that people with fewer education experience more likely to be unemployment, which results in a percentage rise in property and violent crime. Lochner's (2020) study disclosed this phenomenon from the perspective of time and risk. Owing to criminals requiring paying the time costs for crimes, they have no chance to participate in other productive purposes simultaneously, such as jobs (Lochner, 2020). As such, citizens who devote themselves to their work make them focus on meaningfully spending time instead of illegal behaviour. Furthermore, Lochner (2020) found that individuals with better labour market opportunities are unwilling to bear the punishment of a certain period of imprisonment resulting from criminal activities. Alternatively, workers are averse to losing their precious jobs because of crimes. However, Jonck et al. (2015) mentioned that the possibility of financial crimes increases with the staff's years of education. Such a view needs to be proven by further research because Machin, Vujic and Marie (2012) argue that education reduces employee's economic crime. Therefore, education benefits citizens with better employment opportunities, whilst they will be subjected to unnecessary time costs and the risk of unemployment if they commit crimes. In summary, this evidence is feasible.

2.2 Evidence 2

Education is conducive to the public's earnings growth, which effectively prevents the occurrence of criminal activities. Firstly, it is necessary to illustrate that education promotes the labour wage level. A large number of existing studies (West, 2000; Buonanno & Leonida, 2009; Fella & Gallipoli, 2014; Christle, Jolivet, & Nelson, 2007) pay particular attention to the connection between education level and salary. West (2000) clarifies a fact that education is related to the labour market, and both sides of this equation are changeable. Such a relationship is further clarified by Buonanno and Leonida (2009) that increasing education standards improve people's employment and wages. By contrast, Fella and Gallipoli (2014) observed that high tuition fee pose the emergence of dropout or uneducated citizens who will be dealt with income distribution inequality. For example, students who drop out of school have few employment options; they usually participate in low-skilled or low-income positions and are less likely to be promoted by their superiors (Christle, Jolivet, & Nelson, 2007). Therefore,

individuals with richer schooling experience enjoy more generous remuneration; otherwise, they may suffer from unequal earning treatment. Then, once people secure employment with a high income, they will pay a high price for engaging in illegal activities. A considerable body of published research (Yildiz, Ocal, & Yildirim, 2013; Hjalmarsson & Lochner, 2012; Christle, Jolivet, & Nelson, 2007; Machin, Vujić, & Marie, 2012; Hansen, 2003) strongly supports the view that more munificent wages decrease the probability of illegal activities occurring. Yildiz, Ocal and Yildirim's (2013) research directly shows that an increase in income will lead to a decline in the number of criminals. Similarly, Hjalmarsson and Lochner (2012) also acknowledged that higher earnings contribute to a reduction in undergraduates' criminal activities after school. In comparison, low-educational level young citizens are underpaid, thus encouraging them to make a living from crime (Christle, Jolivet, & Nelson, 2007). In terms of further explanations, Lochner (2020) considers that the price of crime is high for civilians with better wages, which renders them afraid to engage in delinquency. Mature workers avoid offending others because they secure steady and generous wages through their academic success (Hansen, 2003). Additionally, as a productive adult, it is unwise to run the risk of sacrificing a stable income (Machin, Vujić, & Marie, 2012). Notably, a higher salary may increase tax fraud (Groot & van den Brink, 2010). However, it is an insignificant consideration because wage growth is still the primary means to combat crimes (Yildiz, Ocal, & Yildirim, 2013). Consequently, citizens with more earnings are less likely to commit crimes, and high salaries are a good result of education. Combining the first with the second evidence, both strongly support the first claim: higher education degree leads to better employment, thereby decreasing the crime rate.

3. Claim 2: People with more Education Tend to Lose the Desire to Commit Crimes

3.1 Evidence 1

Richer educational experiences develop better moralities, which leads to citizens' unwillingness to become criminals. A series of prior researchers (e.g., Lochner, 2020; Groot & van den Brink, 2010) indicated that higher education level results in civilians' good character, which alleviates their eagerness for committing crimes. Referring to Lochner's (2020) findings, schooling makes students clearly realize their obligation to treat others better, reducing their psychological rewards for crimes. Besides, Groot and van den Brink (2010) state that education is beneficial for people to manage their emotions well and avoid committing illegal acts. Furthermore, education also teaches citizens compassion, a freer world outlook, and self-control capacity, rendering them less likely to commit violent crimes (Groot & van den Brink, 2010). It is noteworthy that Wikström and Svensson (2010) claimed that self-control ability is integral to avoiding crime, which is only feasible for individuals with weak legal knowledge. Nevertheless, their findings are not sufficiently reasonable in this essay's context because their study subjects focus on British teenagers aged 14 to 15. What is more, continuing to receive education enables teenagers to escape the inactive and lazy life attitude, thus decreasing the possibility of committing crimes due to idleness (Nordin, 2018). Benefiting from citizens' morality resulting from

education, the rate of violent crimes (contact crimes) has decreased significantly (Machin, Vujić, & Marie, 2012), which includes the destruction of public property, threats, attacks and injuries (Jonck et al., 2015). Consequently, citizens develop their friendly, sympathetic, diligent and self-controlled personalities through continuously accepting education, which is conducive to restraining their sense of reward from engaging in illegal events. On the contrary, dropout groups probably lacks good personality cultivation and tends to join criminal incidents, such as robberies, destruction and threats, injuries and attacks (Groot & van den Brink, 2010). Some previous studies (Maynard, Salas-Wright, & Vaughn, 2015; Christle, Jolivet, & Nelson, 2007; Wikström & Svensson, 2010) have clarified the relationship between poor education status, ethics and crime rate. Wikström and Svensson (2010) argued that a lower degree of education contributes to the citizens' weaker moral standards, which makes them lack self-control ability and, ultimately, participate in crimes. More miserably, Christle, Jolivet and Nelson (2007) proved that dropping out of school may lead to students' mental illness. Once these dropout groups suffer from psychological issues, the probability of participating in criminal activities significantly increases (Maynard, Salas-Wright, & Vaughn, 2015). Thus, education shapes people's good character, which effectively boosts their sense of disapproval and guilt about participating in illegal activities (Cromby et al., 2010).

3.2 Evidence 2

People with longer schooling experience are more likely to avoid crimes due to their knowledge of risk aversion learned from school. Though Lochner (2011) expresses a sceptical attitude toward this opinion, several previous studies (e.g. Machin, Vujić, & Marie, 2012; Ehrlich, 1975; Hjalmarsson & Lochner, 2012) overwhelmingly refute Lochner's (2011) assessment. As previously reported by Machin, Vujić and Marie (2012) research, education increases people's risk aversion awareness, which limits illegal activities. Similarly, Ehrlich (1975) also emphasises that education reduces citizens' opportunities to engage in crime because they are aware of the heavy price of criminal activities. Hjalmarsson and Lochner (2012) explain that citizens shrink their motivation of crime because their learning experience alarm them that participating in illegal activities culminate in the high cost of longstanding detention. Moreover, combined with the first claim evidence outlined, the public may also be required to focus on losing job opportunities and continuous income hazards caused by criminal activities. In addition, patient individuals with risk consciousness prefer to be farsighted and pursue long-term benefits rather than immediate interests (Machin, Vujić, & Marie, 2012). Therefore, the aforementioned interpretative statements clearly show that education increases citizens awareness of avoiding the adverse consequences of criminal behaviour, thereby reducing the crime rate. By contrast, people who drop out of school may greatly underestimate the severe criminal consequences and are more likely to engage in delinquency. Some prior studies (Lochner, 2020; Lochner, 2004; Oreopoulos, 2007) suggest that uneducated people who plan to participate in offence usually learn little risk prevention concepts from their education stage. Lochner (2004) explains that dropout students usually realize that the price of imprisonment is negligible because their work skills are generally poor. Additionally, teenagers who

leave school early tend to be concerned with the immediate interests of learning and the direct cost of school (tuition) (Oreopoulos, 2007). Hence, they create dangerous behaviours owing to their underestimation of criminality's negative impacts (Lochner, 2020). As a result, citizens with higher education levels do have a better sense of risk aversion, which prevents them from participating in illegal activities without hesitation. Reviewing the first evidence in this claim, individuals who receive more education develop better personalities, which helps to significantly reduce crime rates. Both pieces of evidence convincingly prove the availability of my second claim: people with more education tend to lose the desire to commit crimes.

4. Claim 3: Schools Decrease Citizens' Likelihood of Offending during Education.

4.1 Evidence 1

School plays a key role in restraining the opportunity to commit crimes in the student's education process. Specifically, schooling limits the learners' action scope, which effectively avoids participation in illegal activities. Firstly, it is undeniable that citizens studying in schools are less likely to engage in crimes. From this perspective, extending compulsory education time signifies that citizens are kept in school longer, which has an apparent negative impact on citizens' crime engagement. Based on the policy of increasing the length of compulsory education, the arrest rate of young men has decreased by approximately 6 percent on average in the US since the 1980s (Bell, Costa, & Machin, 2022). Additionally, by analysing the panel data of commuting areas (cities and suburbs) in the US from 1980 to 2010, Bell, Costa and Machin (2016) also discovered that education time extension decreases equally uneducated groups' criminal participation. The following concrete examples from previous literature (Hjalmarsson & Lochner, 2012; Bell, Costa, & Machin, 2022; Machin, Vujić, & Marie, 2012; Anderson, 2014) manifests how educational institutions cut down the likelihood of students engaging in criminal activities. First and foremost, Hjalmarsson and Lochner (2012) explained that educational institutions have the unique effect that teenagers cannot be in two places simultaneously. Such effect is further defined by Machin, Vujić and Marie (2012) as self-incapacitation, which means young students spend most of their time in school rather than outside. Despite Hjalmarsson and Lochner (2012) highlighting that the incapacity function of schooling is particularly practicable in urban areas, the indisputable fact is that schools still limit students' criminal chances. Secondly, Many criminal opportunities are more limited in schools than in the streets (Hjalmarsson & Lochner, 2012). Alternatively, it is obviously difficult for schools to create learners' crimes engagement conditions. Thirdly, Anderson (2014) reported that youths who learn in school must fully participate in additional curriculum activities, such as sports and fine arts besides major subjects. Thus, they have no time or opportunities to do strikes or other disruptive activities (Anderson, 2014). As a result, as students are controlled, their opportunities and time for free or illegal activities outside school are correspondingly declined. Combining all of the aforementioned cases, during the education procedure, school causes students to have a self-incapacitation effect (Machin, Vujić, & Marie, 2012), which ultimately reduces

the possibility of potential delinquency.

4.2 Evidence 2

Education provides citizens ample opportunities to communicate with good peers in school, thereby avoiding contact with criminals in society. From this perspective, the fine interaction atmosphere created by the school prevented the occurrence of criminal activities. Relevant literature (e.g., Mowen & Boman IV, 2020; Lochner, 2020) has demonstrated the connection between school, peers and crimes. Firstly, the precondition is that students who accept education experience in school must stay with their classmates. According to Lochner's (2020) statement, school education enables young learners to communicate with their peers, similar to early social activities, which is consistent with this evidence prerequisite. Under this context, Mowen and Boman IV (2020) regard peer as the key standard to measure crimes. Following this, certain studies (Lochner, 2010; Mowen & Boman IV, 2020; Fergusson, Swain-Campbell, & Horwood, 2002) illustrate and explain the argument of this evidence in detail: high-quality peers gather together, which reduces their potential of becoming offenders. Lochner (2010) claims that high-quality schools provide students with basic education and good peers, which leads to better socialisation and peer interaction. Consequently, youngsters' personal or psychological rewards are minimised when they are involved in crimes, eventually decreasing the crime rate (Lochner, 2010). By contrast, Mowen and Boman IV's (2020) point out that peers and families can incite crimes. As such, if teenagers' interdependent companions are hooligans, they tend to commit criminal acts together. In addition, Fergusson, Swain-Campbell and Horwood (2002) assert that young students communicating with mentally unhealthy peers is more likely to lead to a series of illegal behaviours. Such behaviours include violent crimes, property crimes, alcohol abuse, cannabis abuse and nicotine dependence (Fergusson, Swain-Campbell, & Horwood, 2002). Therefore, during the education, schools provide friendly contemporaries to students, leading to them being less likely to engage in criminal activities. Otherwise, those negative peers who drop out of school and join gangs will presumably induce teenagers to engage in illegal acts. Despite this, Luallen (2006) mentioned the negative point that social interaction in schools potentially leads to disputes and more general group-based crimes. However, in most cases, the probability of these crimes depends on peers' degree of friendliness which can be improved by education (Hjalmarsson & Lochner, 2012). Referring to the first piece of evidence in this claim, the school also plays the role of imprisonment (Machin, Vujić, & Marie, 2012), which limits the scope of students' activities and reduces incidence of crime. Thus, supported by two credible pieces of evidence, the third claim in this paper is valid: schools decrease citizens' likelihood of offending during education.

5. Discussion and Suggestion

In this essay, I try to collect convincing evidence from published sources on education and crime topics to prove the statement. After collecting evidence through the relevant literature classification and screening, I established feasible claims from three directions. Firstly, education results in better

employment, which reduces citizens' crime engagement possibility through better job opportunities and salaries. Secondly, education restrains citizens' desire to engage in illegal activities by cultivating good character and instilling a sense of risk aversion. Third, during the schooling process, the school controls the students' moving scope and provides them with friendly peers, which prevents the occurrence of criminal incidents. Therefore, each claim is supported by corresponding evidence, which persuasively proves my position. However, the essay has certain limitations. Different existing research has published findings that are inconsistent with my evidence (for instance, excessive education may lead to citizens participating in economic crimes), which is unfavourable for the present study to draw a firm conclusion. Despite this, the aforementioned evidence provides a full explanation and refutations for these counterarguments from four aspects: inconsistency of background or preconditions; weak influence; relevant literature conflicts; respondents' limitations. In conclusion, although education has a slight risk of causing criminal activities increase, overall people's more educational experience unquestionably reduces their participation in crime. Ultimately, the statement (position) of this paper is rationale: citizens with more educational experience are less likely to engage in illegal and criminal activities.

Finally, it is necessary to offer recommendations and future considerations. As for the policymakers, first, they should pay attention to designing educational policy rather than increasing harsh criminal law. The cost of imprisonment is often much higher than education, with a worse effect (Fella & Gallipoli, 2014). Second, the probability of crimes committed by highly educated groups has been reduced to an insignificant level (Hansen, 2003). Thus, policymakers should encourage the development of fundamental education for the weak and disadvantaged groups, which will positively impacts crime rate reduction (Lochner, 2011). Third, educational institutions should pay more attention to moral education when imparting knowledge because educated people still commit crimes due to their lack of morality (Lochner, 2004). With regards to researchers, they should study in detail the relationship between education and crime in the context of globalisation. In doing so, the distinct causes of crime in different countries and regions can be identified and mitigation measures proposed. Furthermore, I found that a proportion of the existing literature only focused on providing education suggestions for limiting public's crime participation. However, researchers must also further explore and evaluate their insights' effectiveness, guiding citizens who may go astray to the right path.

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