

Family Structures After Terrorism: A Quantitative Case Study of the Tokyo Subway Sarin Attack in 1995

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Abstract

While burgeoning literature highlights the role of stressful events in shaping population dynamics, research on the spill-over effects of political violence on family structures is scarce and inconclusive. On the one hand, exposure to terrorism may lead to family conflict due to psychological stress. On the other hand, exposure to terrorism may increase family solidarity to cope with insecurity and uncertainty. This study exploits the Tokyo subway sarin attack in 1995—a *de facto* indiscriminate terrorist attack and the most disastrous terrorist incident in modern Japanese history—to understand family consequences. Exploiting a difference-in-differences strategy with municipal-level data, this study finds that years following the Tokyo attack, divorce rates, proportions of female-headed households, and nuclear family households are lower in the Tokyo metropolis than its adjacent prefectures. The effects of the Tokyo attack are greater in municipalities where the affected subway lines serve than municipalities without those lines. The study then augments the main results using prefecture-level data and the synthetic control method. The results suggest unintended consequences of political violence in shaping household composition.

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