

Punching Out, Not Down: The Impact of Paid Sick Leave on Child Maltreatment

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Child Maltreatment and This Study

- **What is child maltreatment?**

- ▶ **Abuse:** physical, sexual, emotional (this study focuses on abuse)
- ▶ Neglect

- **Why it Matters?**

- ▶ Lasting harm: poor health, lower education, economic instability (Currie & Widom, 2010; Lansford et al., 2002; Danese & Widom, 2023)
- ▶ Social burden (U.S.): 7.7 victims per 1,000 children in 2022; \$592B national burden (Children's Bureau, 2024; Klika et al., 2020)

- **What drives it?**

- ▶ Risk factors: public programs, economic shocks, health access, environmental stress (Aslim et al., 2025; Bullinger & Boy, 2023; Bullinger et al., 2025; Brown & De Cao, 2020; Evans et al., 2025; Evans et al., 2022; Muratori, 2025; Raissian & Bullinger, 2017; Sandner et al., 2025)
- ▶ Channels: financial strain, parental time, mental health

- **This paper:**

- ▶ Examines how a modest labor protection, **Paid Sick Leave (PSL)**, reduces child abuse and improve household well-being.

Paid Sick Leave (PSL) and PSL Mandates in the U.S.

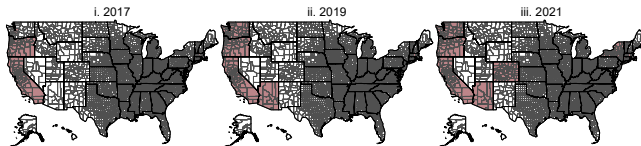
PSL:

- Employer-funded policy allowing workers to recover or care for family without losing pay
- Accrues gradually (1 hr per 30–40 hrs worked)
- No doctor note required ▶ Comparisons across leave policies

"I just took some pain medication and went into work anyway... It would have been nice to stay home." — Richard Eiker, McDonald's worker without paid sick leave for 40 years. (U.S. News & World Report, Apr 29, 2025)

PSL mandates:

- No federal law; 15+ states and 20+ cities since 2007 (A Better Balance, 2024)
- Mandates expand access and usage (Maclean, Pichler, & Ziebarth, 2025)
 - ▶ Coverage increases by ~30 pp within 5 years; 2 additional sick days taken
 - ▶ Largest gains in low-coverage industries and occupations (i.e. construction, retail, food services, transportation)



Policy Relevance: PSL Debates and This Paper's Contribution

- **Ongoing debate:** Policymakers continue to reconsider or scale back paid sick leave mandates, raising questions about their broader social impacts.

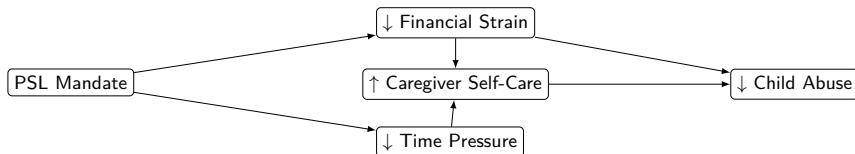


Figure: News Coverage of PSL Expansion Debates

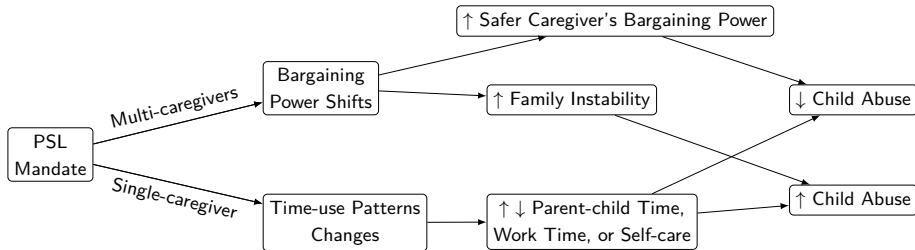
- **Existing evidence:** PSL mandates improves labor force attachment, health, and family time, with minimal employer cost (6¢/hour). (Callison & Pesko, 2022; Maclean, Pichler, & Ziebarth, 2025; Maclean & Pablonia, 2024; Pichler & Ziebarth, 2017; Slopen, 2023, 2024)
- **This paper:** Extends this discussion by showing that PSL mandate **reduces child maltreatment**, offering new policy insight on its role as a *family-centered preventive labor policy*.

How PSL Can Change Child Abuse?

i. Income Effects



ii. Substitution Effects



National Incident-Based Reporting System (NIBRS), 2007–2019

- Monthly, incident-level reports from participating law enforcement agencies
- Definition of victim children:
 - ▶ victim under 18
 - ▶ offended by their parents, stepparents, or parent's partner
- To address the reporting issue:
 - ▶ Victim counts are aggregated to year-agency level
 - ✓ sample restricted to agencies with full-year reporting
 - ✓ agency fixed effects included in the regression model
 - ▶ Robustness checks: year-balanced agency panel; counts aggregated to the county level.

Change of Average Reported Child Victim Before and After PSL Mandate

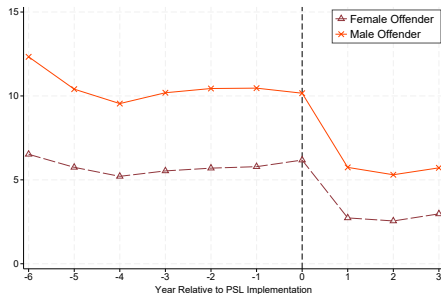
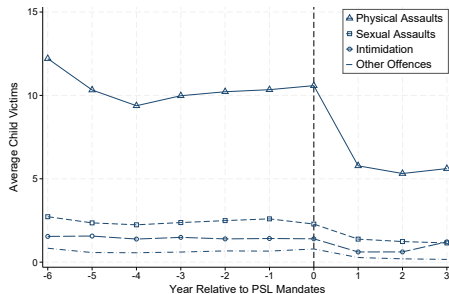


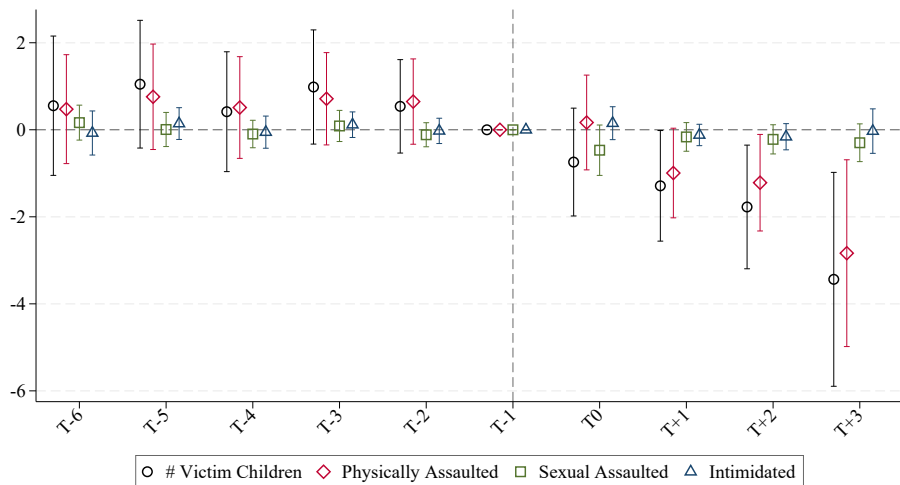
Figure: Average Number of Reported Child Victims Across Reporting Agencies

Event Study Design

$$Y_{act} = \sum_{\substack{\tau=6 \\ \tau \neq -1}}^3 \beta_{\tau} \mathbf{1}\{t - t_a^* = \tau\} + \beta_2 X'_{at} + \beta_3 Z'_{ct} + \gamma_a + \delta_t + \varepsilon_{act}$$

- Y_{act} : # victim children reported by agency a , in county c , year t
- $\mathbf{1}\{t - t_a^* = \tau\}$: Event time indicators relative to mandate year t_a^*
- β_{τ} : Dynamic treatment effects (intent-to-treat)
- X'_{at} : Agency-level controls
 - ▶ MSA status, population size
- Z'_{ct} : County-level controls
 - ▶ demographics, poverty, income, and unemployment
- γ_a, δ_t : Agency fixed effects; Year fixed effects
- ε_{act} : Error term clustered at the agency level
- Regression is weighted by county population under 18

Event Study Results: Interaction-weighted Estimators (Sun & Abraham, 2021)

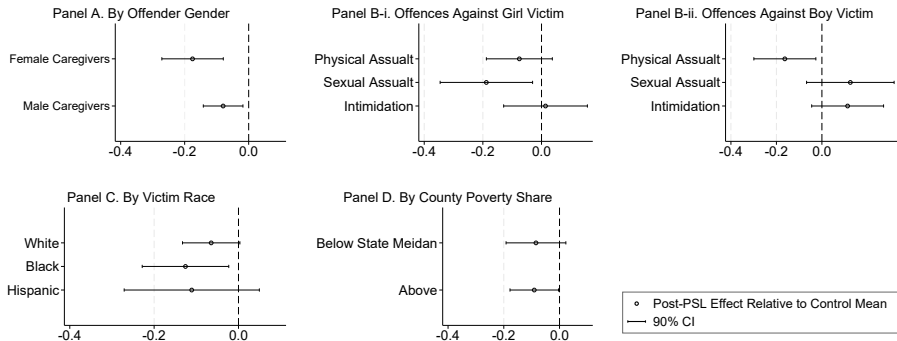


- PSL reduces the number of children suffering from child abuse by around **10%**, concentrated in the physical abuse case.

Event Study Results: Robustness Checks

- ① DiD Estimator ➤ DiD
 - ▶ Log(Count Victim Child + 1)
 - ▶ Poisson Estimation
- ② Other Specifications
 - ▶ No Controls ➤ NoCtrl
 - ▶ IPW ➤ IPW
 - ▶ Log(Count Victim Child + 1) ➤ Log
 - ▶ Cases Count ➤ Case
- ③ Sample Restrictions
 - ▶ Year-Balanced Panel ➤ Balanced
 - ▶ County-Aggregated Victim Children Count ➤ County
- ④ Policy Heterogeneity
 - ▶ Omit State with Pre-State Policies ➤ NoPre
 - ▶ Omit Locations with Stricter Eligibility ➤ NoStrict
 - ▶ Additional Controls for Other Policies ➤ OthP
- ⑤ Falsification Test
 - ▶ Other Cases ➤ Other
- ⑥ Placebo Test
 - ▶ Shifting the treatment period five years earlier ➤ FiveYearEarlier
 - ▶ Leave-one-out analysis of treated state ➤ LeaveOneOutAnalysis

Heterogeneous Results: By Offender and Victim Characteristics



- Stronger effects for **female caregivers**
- By child gender: girls ↓ **sexual abuse**, boys ↓ **physical abuse**
- Larger impacts among **Black children** and in **low-income counties**

Mechanisms

Financial Well-Being ▶▶ Graph

- Data: Current Population Survey (CPS) 2007-2019
- PSL increases employment and wages for **mothers**

Health ▶▶ Graph

- Data: CPS 2007-2019
- PSL improves self-reported health among **partnered mothers**

Time Allocation ▶▶ Graph

- Data: American Time Use Survey 2007-2019
- **Partnered mothers** spend more time with children, enhancing protection from their higher-risk male partners
- **Single fathers** spend less time with children, reducing exposure to potential harm
- No evidence of outsourcing: **Other adults** do not change the time they spend with non-own children

Within-Household Dynamics ▶▶ Graph

- Data: CPS and NIBRS
- PSL does *not* induce changes in family composition, or increasing intimate partner violence.

Conclusion

- This paper exploits staggered rollout of PSL mandates and uses NIBRS data (2007-2019)
- I find that PSL mandates **reduce** reported child victims by **10%** per agency-year
 - ▶ Strongest effects: female caregivers, Black children, and high-poverty areas
 - ▶ Likely mechanisms: Improved **female caregiver well-being**; Less exposure to high-risk **male caregivers**

Policy Impact:

- 0.12 fewer cases per 1,000 treated parents annually
- \$3.54B in lifetime costs averted nationwide

⇒ *Workplace protections like PSL offer meaningful social returns by promoting child safety.*

Thank you!

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Comparisons Across Leave Policies

Policy	Duration	Pay	Use Case	Access/reqs
Paid Sick Leave (PSL)	Hours to Days	Full	Minor illness (Self/Family)	Immediate & Job-protected
Family & Medical Leave (FML)	Extended (Weeks)	Unpaid	Serious health or Childbirth	Strict eligibility (Tenure/Size)
Paid Medical & Family Leave (PMFL)	Extended (Weeks)	Partial	Serious health or Childbirth	State agency application
Temp. Disability Ins. (TDI)	Extended (Weeks)	Partial	Non-work disability	State agency application
Workers Comp.	Indefinite	Varies	Work-related injury	Incident-based
Paid Time Off (PTO)	Days	Full	General/Vacation	Employer discretion

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Table: DiD: Effects of the PSL Mandate on Reported Victim Children

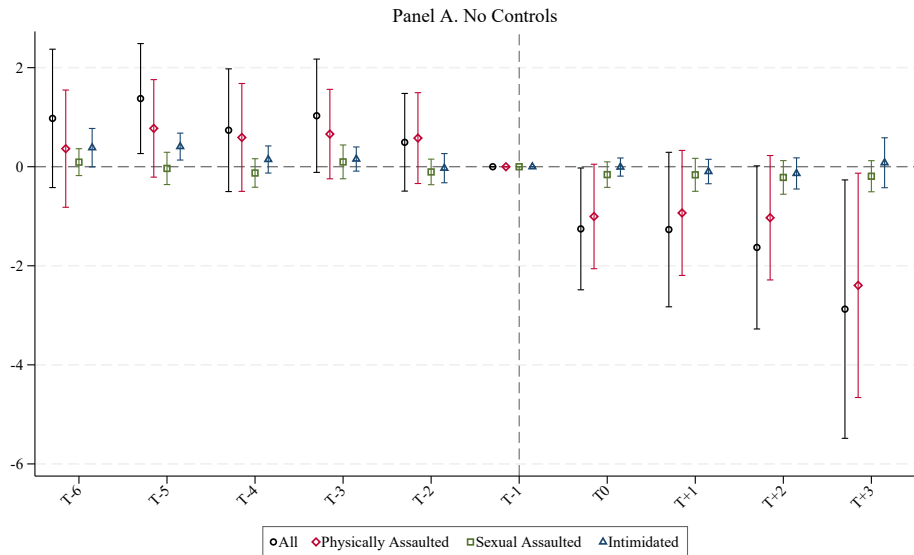
Dependent variable	Reported Victim Children			Log of Victim
	Baseline (1)	(2)	Poisson (3)	Children + 1 (4)
1{PSL Mandate}	-2.178*** (0.669)	-1.571*** (0.535)	-0.131*** (0.029)	-0.109*** (0.025)
Control Mean	15.929	15.929	15.929	1.533
Effects Relative to Control Mean	-0.137	-0.099		
Observations	66411	66411	59168	66411
Controls		X	X	X
Agency FE and Year FE	X	X	X	X

* Statistically significant at the 10 percent level.

** Statistically significant at the 5 percent level.

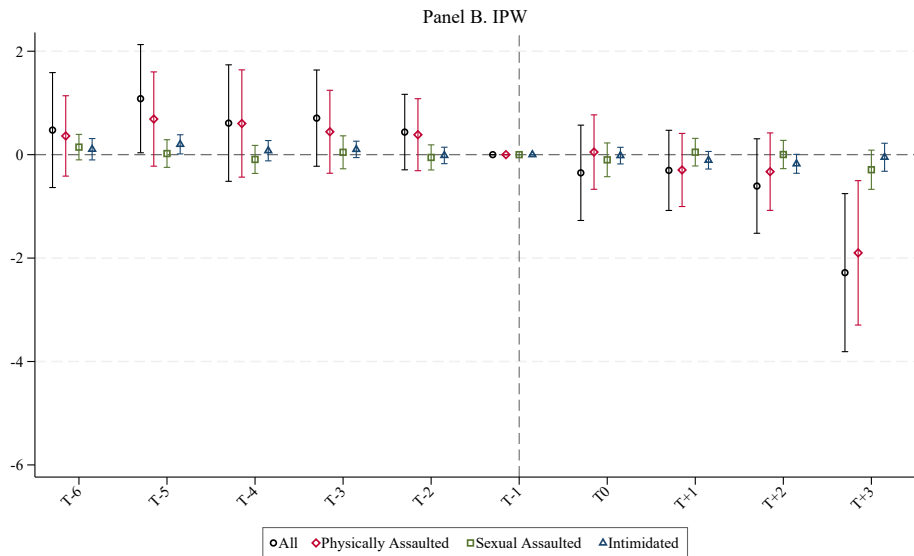
*** Statistically significant at the 1 percent level. [▶ back](#)

Event Study: No Other Controls



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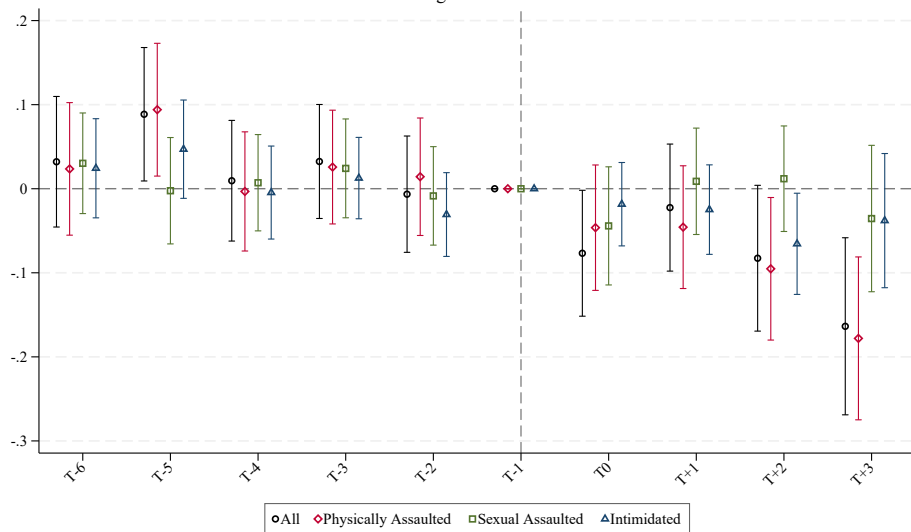
Event Study: IPW



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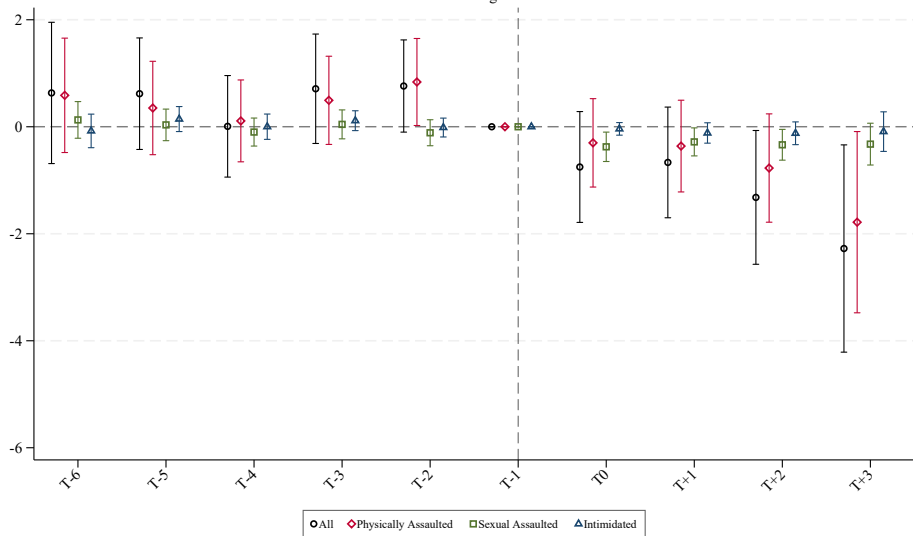
Event Study: Log-form of Dependent Variable

Panel C. Log of Vitim Children+1



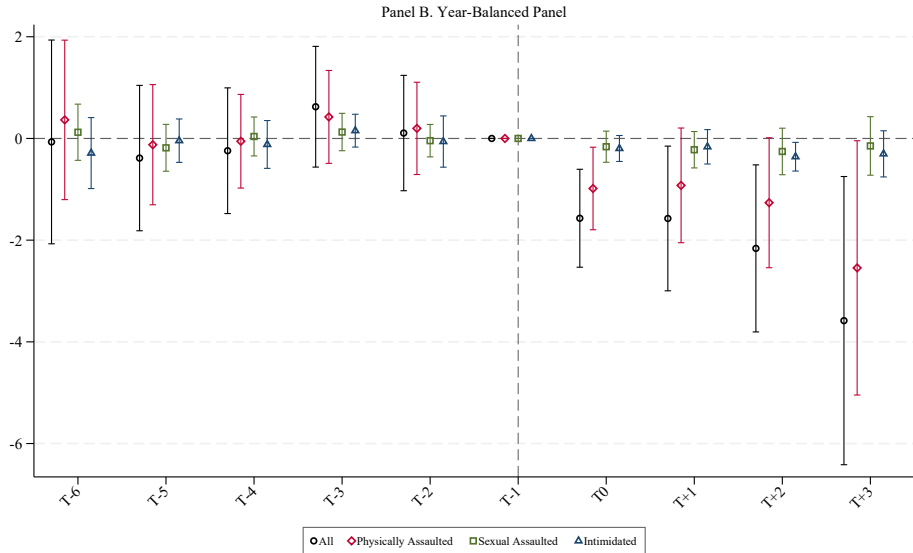
Event Study: Case Count

Panel A. Case Involving Victim Children



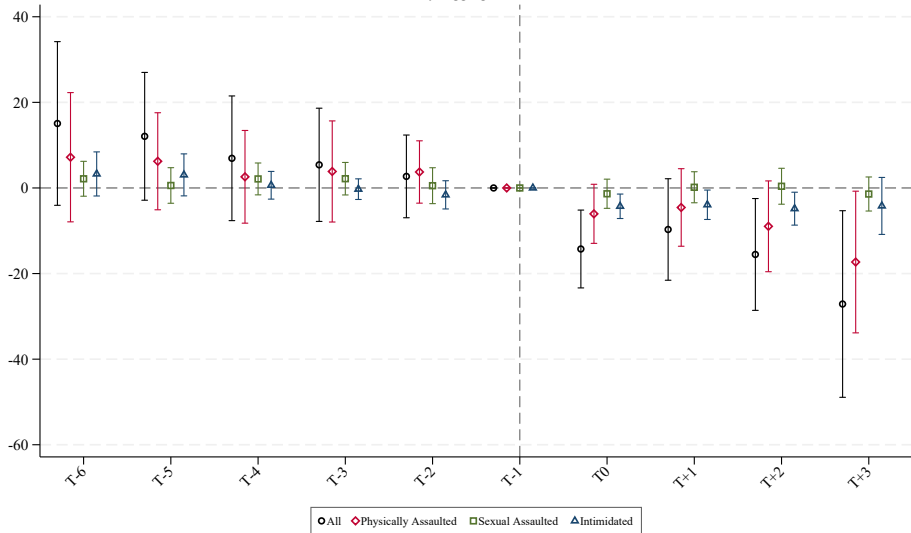
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Event Study: Year-Balanced Panel



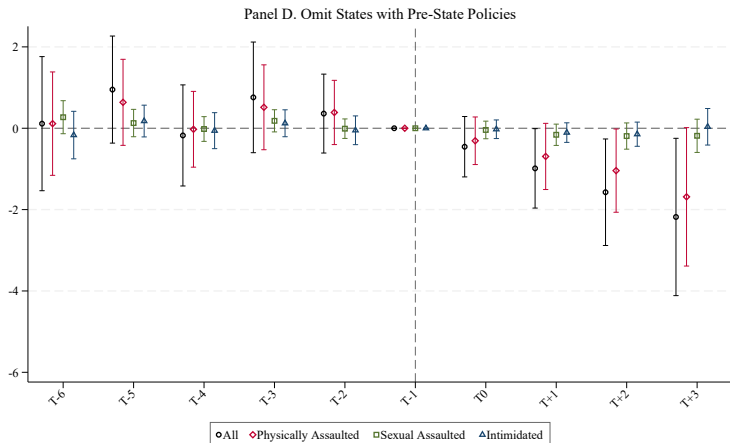
Event Study: County-Aggregated Victim Children

Panel C. County-Aggregated Victim Children



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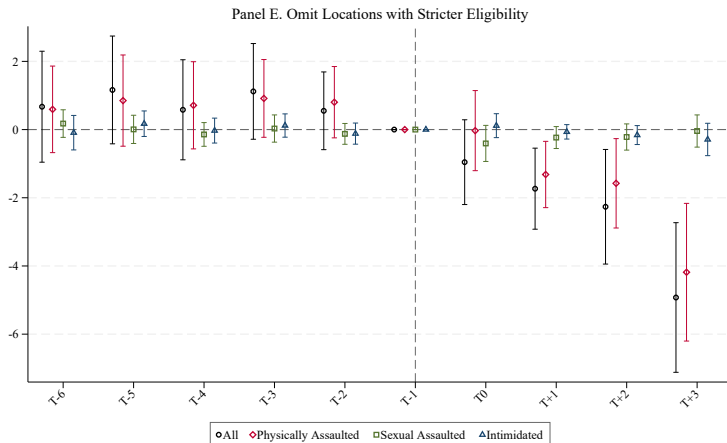
Event Study: Omit States with Pre-State Policies



- Excludes Maryland, Minnesota, and Washington, where some localities adopted PSL before the state mandate

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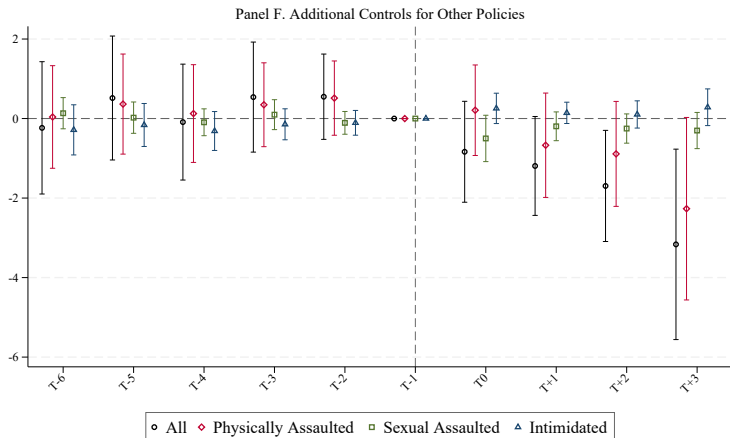
Event Study: Omit Locations with Stricter Eligibility



- Excludes Minneapolis, Saint Paul, Maryland, and Connecticut, where PSL eligibility depends on employee type or sector

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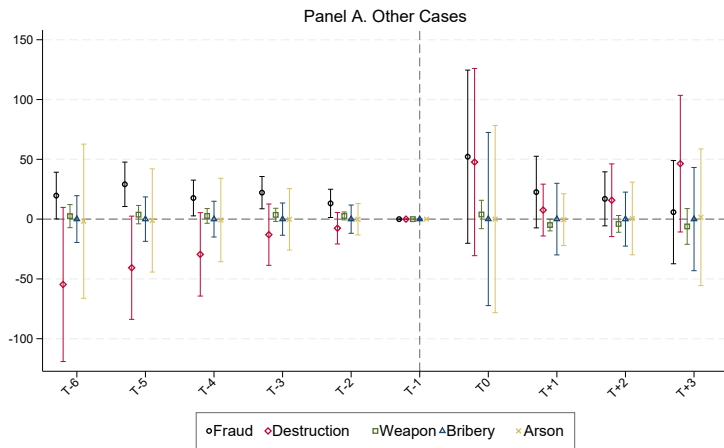
Event Study: Additional Controls for Other Policies



- These estimations include controls for: (1) state PFML policies, (2) state Medicaid expansion under the ACA, and (3) state EITC rate.

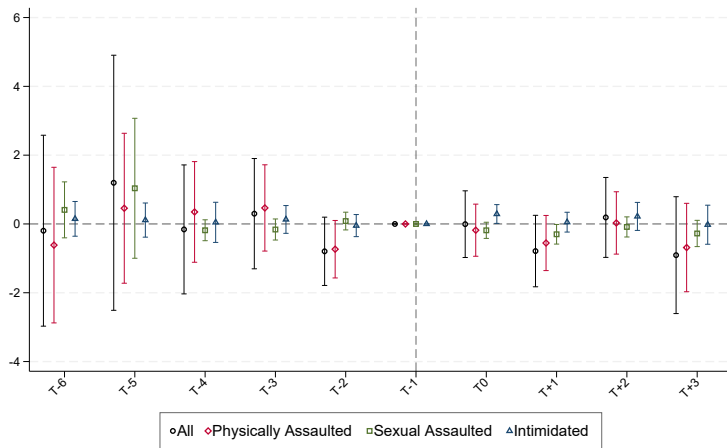
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Event Study: Effects of PSL Mandates on Other Cases



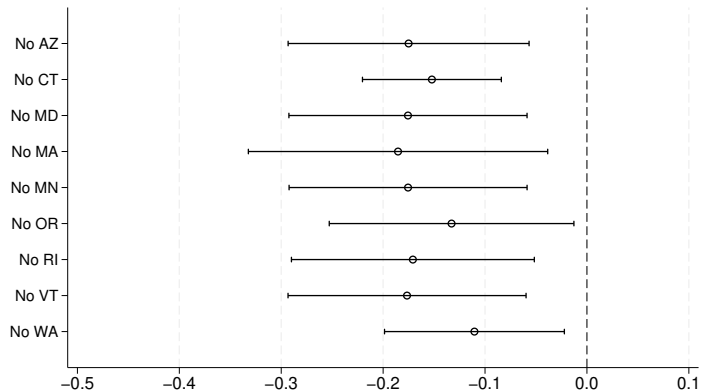
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Event Study: Effects of Artificial PSL Mandates



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Event Study: Leave-One-Out Analysis

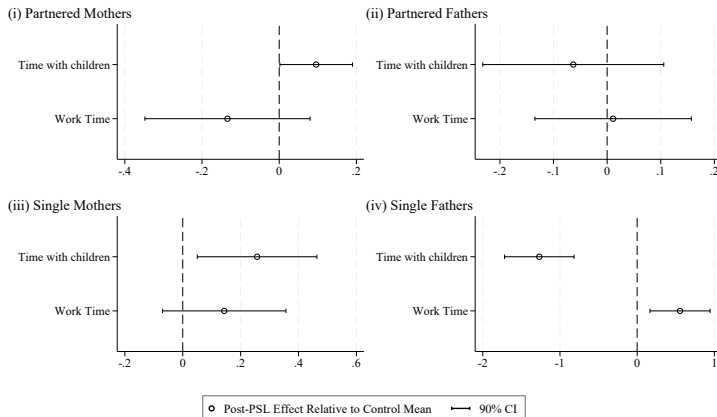


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Event Study: Effects of PSL Mandates on Other Cases

Dependent variable	Reported Victim Children			
	Total	Physical Assault	Sexual Assault	Intimidation
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
<i>Panel A. Female Child Victims</i>				
Average Treatment Effects	-1.031** (0.427)	-0.294 (0.266)	-0.354** (0.181)	0.006 (0.035)
Control Mean	8.676	3.884	1.884	0.406
Average Effects Relative to Control Mean	-0.119	-0.076	-0.188	0.014
<i>p</i> -value for Pre-policy IW Estimators	0.824	0.621	0.533	0.648
<i>Panel B. Male Child Victims</i>				
Average Treatment Effects	-0.753** (0.308)	-0.649** (0.330)	0.045 (0.042)	0.047 (0.040)
Control Mean	7.181	3.986	0.357	0.412
Average Effects Relative to Control Mean	-0.105	-0.163	0.125	0.113
<i>p</i> -value for Pre-policy IW Estimators	0.220	0.785	0.035	0.167
Observations	66411	66411	66411	66411
Agency FE and Year FE	X	X	X	X
Controls	X	X	X	X

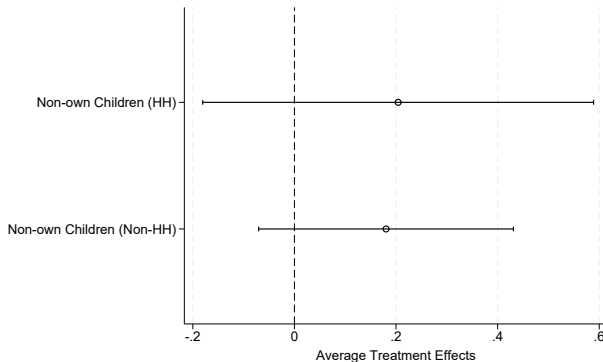
Mechanism Check: Effects on Parents' Time Reallocation



Source: American Time Use Survey (ATUS), 2007-2019

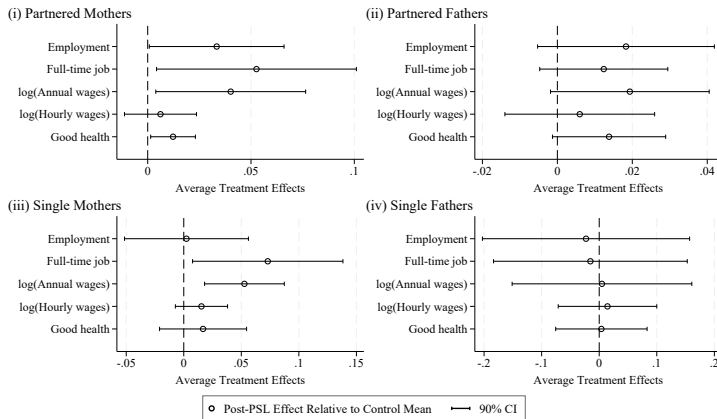
- Partnered mothers spend more time with children, enhancing protection from their higher-risk male partners
- Single fathers spend less time with children, reducing exposure to potential harm [» back](#)

Mechanism Check: Effects on Adults' Time Spent on Non-own Children



- Adults do not change the time they spend with non-own children; there is no evidence of outsourcing. [▶ back](#)

Mechanism Check: Effects on Parents' Employment, Job, Wages, and Health

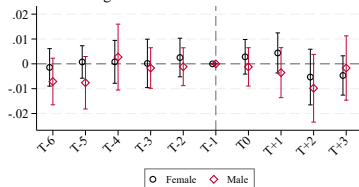


Source: Current Population Survey (CPS), 2007-2019

- PSL increases employment and wages for mothers
- Significant improvement in self-reported health among parented mothers [▶▶ back](#)

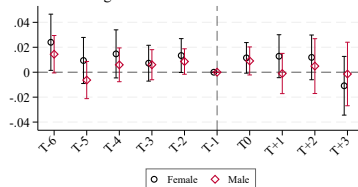
Mechanism Check: Effects on Within-Household Dynamic Change

Panel A. Residing with Partners



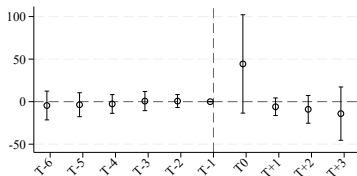
Source: CPS

Panel B. Residing with Children



Source: CPS

Panel C. Victims in Intimate Partner Violence



Source: NIBRS

- Reduction in child abuse does not come from the family dissolution, or arise from increasing intra-household conflicts. [▶▶ back](#)