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# Fracking and Risky Behaviors: Evidence from Pennsylvania

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## Highlights

- We assess the association between shale gas development and risky behaviors
- Unconventional gas development leads to higher rates of gonorrhea and chlamydia
- Estimated impacts are separate from changes in demographic composition or income.

## Abstract

In the past decade, the technological developments in the oil and natural gas extraction industry made the extraction of shale gas economically feasible and prompted local economic booms across the US. Anecdotal evidence suggests that areas with unconventional gas development experience a disproportionate increase in the young male population who are more likely to be involved in risk-taking behavior. Moreover, the sudden income gains or demographic shifts might increase the demand for various goods and services, including entertainment and illegal activities provided by the adult entertainment industry. We investigate the relationship between unconventional gas development and a variety of risk-taking outcomes such as sexually transmitted infections, and prostitution-related arrests. Our identification strategy exploits the variation in shale gas or unconventional well drilling across time and counties in conjecture with a number of datasets that allow us to investigate the potential mechanisms. Our findings indicate that Pennsylvania counties with fracking activities have higher rates of gonorrhea and chlamydia infections (7.8% and 2.6%, respectively), as well as higher prostitution related arrests (19.7%). We posit that changes in the labor market and associated impacts to income or composition of workers may play a role in the estimated effects, but we do not find evidence in support of these hypotheses.

JEL: J18 (Public policy); I12 (Health production); Q42 (Alternative Energy Sources)

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