

Preface

CRIME REPRESENTS one of society's most worrisome and persistent problems. People who commit crime impose harm on victims in a number of significant ways: violent injury, psychological trauma, reductions of personal freedom, or losses of property. Crime also creates inherent external costs: one crime, one person's victimization, inevitably gives pause to *others* in society, often engendering greater fear of crime and motivating behaviors designed to prevent crime or lessen its consequences. The creation of these spillovers makes crime as much a problem for government as for individuals. But, by the same token, our efforts at combating crime often create external *benefits* in their own right; for example, if one person installs a security light at his residence, it might deter someone from burglarizing that house as well as a neighbor's house, even if the neighbor did nothing similar to protect himself. The presence of external benefits suggests that if we figure out effective ways to deter individuals from committing crime and effective ways to make people less vulnerable to crime or its consequences, we will have a chance to lessen the problems of crime and crime victimization.

Our individual and collective efforts at crime prevention may actually be working. In June 2009, on the occasion of a new release of U.S. crime statistics, FBI Director Robert Mueller pointed out several notable declines in the number of serious crimes from 2007 to 2008, including a 2.5% decline in violent crimes like murder and rape and a 1.6% decline in property crimes like burglary and larceny. These figures, in fact, reflect a recent trend, charted and discussed pointedly by Zimring (2007), toward lesser criminality in the United States. Is this pattern here to stay, or will it ultimately prove fleeting? Are governmental efforts at deterrence responsible for this? Or are victims, or at least potential victims, living their lives differently than in the past to make themselves less vulnerable? At what cost? Scholarly research on crime and victimization represents

an essential step toward answering questions like these. The central purpose of this book is to illustrate how analytical tools from applied microeconomics can help us more fully understand the commission of crime, the behaviors and motivations of criminals, and the experiences and decisions of victims—analysis that serves as core material for ongoing scholarly research on these issues.

This book, arranged in two parts, presents a unified investigation of economic behaviors and phenomena relating to criminals and victims at the individual level. Part One focuses on offender behavior, Part Two focuses on victim behavior, and each part houses five chapters containing original scholarly studies of topics relevant to our overarching theme, that criminals and victims make important decisions in economically rational ways. Much of the time, both criminals and victims know exactly what they are doing, even if they are acting under serious uncertainty or even physical stress. The micro scope of this book, as the book unfolds over its ten chapters, departs from other scholarly books on this topic that have mostly taken a broader, macro, trend-oriented view of crime and victimization. But, as we shall see, this more micro focus is more in keeping with the seminal economic analysis of crime by Gary S. Becker and other economists.

After providing an overview of how crime economic research has evolved (Chapter 1), Part One features chapters on the planning of crime, violence and damages that occur in the aftermath of crime, criminal evidence destruction, and finally the potential recommission of crime (recidivism). Part Two presents a similar overview of economic research related to victims of crime (Chapter 6), followed by chapters on the individual decision to self-protect against crime, the decision to resist offenders, the decision to report crime, and finally how crime affects the subsequent labor-force participation of victims, one of the often-overlooked consequences of victimization. The two sets of five chapters on offender behavior and victim behavior thus mirror each other in the sense that each set chronicles a logical sequence, or “life cycle,” of criminality and victimization. By examining individual criminal and victim behavior—concentrating on how they make decisions and coming to terms with the unique objectives and constraints that shape those decisions—we can gain clarity on

how public policy or procedure might ultimately affect outcomes that bear on society as a whole.

By design, the analytical chapters of this book generally contain a blend of theoretical and empirical analysis. One exception, Chapter 4 on the criminal destruction of evidence, presents a purely theoretical discussion of that phenomenon, but the analysis is accompanied by an extensive discussion of empirical implications and possibilities for future empirical research. The theoretical analysis that appears throughout this book demonstrates how we might use applied microeconomic tools to conceptualize the particular issue or phenomenon at hand and aids us in formulating concrete, empirically testable hypotheses. The empirical analysis appearing in the book primarily serves as a means of testing those hypotheses and secondarily illustrates how one might use particular econometric methodologies to address specific research questions that become interesting within the field of crime economics.

In presenting theoretical material, I have endeavored to lay out concepts with a level of mathematical detail commensurate with how scholars in crime economics make theoretical points within the confines of academic journals, where the bulk of the crime economic literature appears. At the same time, however, I always accompany mathematical presentation with a parallel discussion of the economic meaning or intuition that lies behind a particular mathematical assumption, functional property, or derivative. Similarly, in discussing empirical techniques and methodologies, I have sought to show enough econometric detail to make clear exactly what procedure I am undertaking and why, with an eye toward helping the reader understand how scholars currently conduct empirical crime economic research and how you might approach your own empirical studies in the future. Readers interested in econometric detail beyond what appears in the book may find it in the articles and books cited in specific chapters. In general, readers familiar with mathematical economics at the level of Chiang (1984) or Silberberg (1990) should have little trouble with the mathematical exposition appearing in this book. Readers comfortable with statistical and econometric analysis at the level of Greene (2008) will be able to follow the book's empirical discussion.

Although I emphasize an economic approach to the topics covered in this book, my analysis, and that of many economists whose work is highlighted in these pages, frequently takes inspiration from other social-science disciplines. The analysis of the planning of crime (Chapter 2), for example, takes great motivation from studies of the ecology and social geography of crime, such as appearing within the disciplines of environmental criminology and quantitative criminology; the analysis of the destruction of evidence (Chapter 4) takes inspiration from policy-oriented legal scholarship; and the analysis of victim resistance and reporting in the aftermath of victimization (Chapters 8 and 9) incorporates insights from studies by sociologists, psychologists, and public health scholars. For this reason, I hope this book will stimulate thinking and new research not just among scholars and graduate students in economics but also among scholars and students in criminology, criminal justice, or other social sciences interested in quantitatively rigorous yet intuitively meaningful analysis of crime and victimization.