

Abstract

In the first essay, I study the effects of reminders and frames designed to invoke higher levels of empathy and altruistic motives on the willingness to donate blood. I conduct a randomized field experiment with 3,236 blood donors from Bosnia and Herzegovina to test how effective frames are when used in letters soliciting blood donation. Further, I test the effectiveness of the letter itself, which served as a specific reminder, making the need for blood more salient. My baseline group did not receive any letter, while another seven groups received letters that differed in terms of goal framing; whether a specific “victim” was identified; and the gender of a “victim”. I find that a reminder of the need for blood in the form of a simple letter increases the probability of donating blood by 6.44 percentage points (62%) relative to the baseline group, suggesting that reminder letters may serve as a cost-effective policy tool. At the same time, I find that the framing of the letter had relatively little effect.

The second essay provides the first evidence of the existence of gender-based favoritism in life-saving decisions to donate blood. In a field experiment with blood donors from Bosnia and Herzegovina, I exogenously manipulate the signal of a blood recipient’s gender by adding his/her name and photograph to a letter soliciting blood donation. Motivated by the literature on identity, I test the influence on donation behavior of two dimensions of shared identity between donor and recipient – gender and age. I find that the probability of giving blood was 7.43 percentage points higher (at the 1% significance level) if the potential blood recipient was of the same gender, as compared to when the gender of the recipient was different. This result was mostly driven by male donors donating to a male recipient. Being of similar age to the blood recipient had relatively little

effect. By identifying an important factor that influences willingness to give blood, these results have implications for better targeting of campaigns to increase blood donations.

The third essay examines the phenomenon of demand for graduate education and postdoctoral training in the natural sciences remaining roughly constant despite dwindling academic career prospects. We investigate whether a reason for this phenomenon is that doctoral students hold excessively optimistic beliefs about the academic job market. We elicit the beliefs and career preferences of a sample of U.S. chemistry graduate students through a novel survey. Within the survey, we randomize respondents into a control and two information treatment groups and provide structured and non-structured information on the true state of the academic job market. We find that graduate students are excessively optimistic about academic prospects and publishing in top journals. Although providing both types of information did lead them to update their beliefs about the market, particularly those students with higher initial beliefs, we do not find an effect of the treatments on the likelihood of pursuing a postdoc, their satisfaction with undertaking PhD studies, or actual career outcomes two years after the intervention.