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Abstract

Does engaging in prosocial behavior increase individual well-being, or are happier individuals simply more likely to self-select into altruistic activities? This paper revisits the relationship between blood donation and life satisfaction using longitudinal data from the German Socio-Economic Panel (SOEP) linked to high-resolution institutional administrative records from the German Red Cross, the largest blood collection organization in Germany.

The study integrates detailed event-level information on the timing and location of blood donations across nearly all German districts in 2009, 2014, and 2019. These records, originally generated for operational and regulatory purposes, are geocoded and harmonized to match the district structure used in SOEP. This linkage enables the construction of an exogenous measure of local donation intensity, which serves as an instrumental variable for individual donation behavior.

While pooled OLS estimates suggest a positive association between recent blood donation and life satisfaction, instrumental variable results provide a more nuanced interpretation. Although regional donation intensity strongly predicts individual donation behavior, the estimated causal effect on life satisfaction becomes statistically weak and sensitive to specification once endogeneity is addressed. Placebo tests and additional robustness checks support the credibility of the identification strategy.

By combining longitudinal survey data with near-complete institutional donation records, this paper contributes to the literature in two ways: first, by reassessing the causal interpretation of the well-being effects of prosocial behavior; and second, by demonstrating how linking survey and institutional administrative records can strengthen identification strategies in panel research. The findings underscore the importance of addressing selection effects when evaluating the subjective well-being consequences of altruistic behavior.

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