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Updated Abstract

The Joy of Giving Blood: Revisiting the Well-Being Effects of Prosocial Behavior Using Linked Institutional and Panel Data

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Does prosocial behavior increase individual well-being, or are happier individuals simply more likely to engage in altruistic activities? This paper revisits the relationship between blood donation and life satisfaction using individual-level data from the German Socio-Economic Panel (SOEP) linked to newly assembled administrative records from the German Red Cross.

Blood donation behavior is observed in the SOEP waves 2010, 2015, and 2020. I link these survey data to event-level records on the timing, location, and volume of blood donations across German districts in the preceding calendar years. Aggregating these records to the district level, I construct a measure of regional blood donation intensity and use it as an instrument for individual recent donation behavior.

Descriptive evidence shows that recent donors report slightly higher life satisfaction and differ from non-donors in health, age, employment, and education. OLS estimates indicate a small positive association, which becomes insignificant once self-rated health is controlled for. In contrast, instrumental-variable estimates remain positive and statistically significant, with strong first stages across the main specifications. Robustness checks show that the result is not driven by the age restriction of the estimation sample or by the linear scaling of the instrument. The estimates are interpreted as local average treatment effects for individuals whose donation behavior is affected by regional donation intensity.

Keywords: Prosocial behavior; blood donation; life satisfaction; instrumental variables; linked survey-administrative data; SOEP.

JEL Codes: C23, C26, D64, I31.

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