

Decision Processes Colloquia

Monday, February 26, 2024

Where: F70 JMHH

When: 12:00 – 1:20 pm

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Stigma and the Social Safety Net

ABSTRACT:

In the United States, there is a pervasive stigma around poverty and government assistance, so-called “welfare stigma.” But although the existence of poverty and welfare stigma has been well-documented, less is known about the extent to which it causally affects access to or participation in government benefit programs, or its relative role as a barrier to take-up compared to other administrative burdens. We present results from a series of online experiments that measure how stigma varies by program and population, and disentangle the factors that causally affect stigma. First, we define three distinct constructs – societal, anticipated, and internalized stigma – and document that these constructs can move independently and are strongly associated with self-reported behavior. Importantly, we also find significant variation in the level of stigma associated with different government programs. We then examine the factors that drive this variation through a conjoint experiment in which we test how different beneficiary characteristics and program features affect stigma. Finally, we show that stigma affects policy-relevant behaviors including burden tolerance and take-up decisions.

