What Motivates Social Security Claiming Age Intentions?
Testing Behaviorally-Informed Interventions Alongside Individual Differences

Adam Greenberg, Hal Hershfield, Suzanne Shu, Stephen Spiller

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The findings and conclusions are solely those of the authors and do not represent the views of SSA, any agency of the Federal Government, the NBER Retirement Research Center, the Center for Retirement Research at Boston College (CRR), and the University of Michigan Retirement Research Center.
Current Study Goals

Given that psychological factors affect claiming age intentions, we:


1. Examine effects of *13 interventions* on claiming age intentions.
2. Examine the role of *individual differences* in claiming age intentions.
3. Examine *interactions* between interventions and individual differences on claiming age intentions.
A Few Notes on Study Approach

1. We measure *intended*, not *realized*, claiming age
   - Expected and realized claiming ages correlate about 0.5
     - Brown, Kapteyn, & Mitchell (2016)

2. Sample (age 40-61) drawn from *Amazon Mechanical Turk*
   - Experimental effects on AMT are similar to those with representative samples
     - Coppock 2018; Mullinix et al. 2015; Snowberg & Yariv 2018

3. Preregistered data collection and analysis plan
   - Targeted N = 4500 (300 per treatment + 600 control)
   - Analyses based on current N = 3105; data collection is ongoing
Study Procedure

1. Participants pre-screened for age
2. Read brief notes on Social Security retirement benefits
3. Saw table of monthly benefits for a typical retiree
4. Encountered 1 of 13 interventions (or control)
5. Reported claiming age intention
6. Completed a set of demographic, psychological, and attitudinal individual difference measures
Median age = 47 (IQR: 42 – 53)
63% women
Median income = $55,000 (IQR: $35,000 - $90,000)
Change in Intended Claiming Age Given 1SD Change

- Numeracy
- Subjective Health
- Financial Literacy
- Life Expectancy
- Patience

-0.25  0.00  0.25  0.50
Control + 13 Interventions

1. **Framing: How are benefits described?**
   - **Annual**: Table of *annual* benefits
   - **Gains**: Table includes *gains* (vs. claiming at age 62)
   - **Losses**: Table includes *losses* (vs. claiming at age 70)

2. **Norms**
3. **Future Self**
4. **Information**
5. **Self-Reflection**
Frame Norms Future Info Reflect
Control Annual Gain Loss Descriptive1 Descriptive2 Injunctive Self Benefits Family Needs Regret Longevity Generate

Intended Claiming Age
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Intended Claiming Age</th>
<th>Control Annual Gain</th>
<th>Loss</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>65</td>
<td>$1,523</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>66</td>
<td>$1,692</td>
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</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Intended Claiming Age</th>
<th>Annual Gain</th>
<th>Loss</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>65</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>66</td>
<td>$20,304</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

% Intending to Claim at Age vs. Intended Claiming Age
Control + 13 Interventions

1. *Framing*

2. **Norms: How do or should people behave?**
   - Descriptive 1: 6 of 10 choose to delay claiming
   - Descriptive 2: 6 of 10 [men/women] like you choose to delay claiming
   - Injunctive: Delaying is a good idea for financial well-being

3. **Future Self: Do I care about “future me?”**
   - Future Self: Focus on future me (needs, wants, and desires)
   - Benefits to Future Self: Future Self + gain from delay
   - Benefits to Future Family: Benefits to Future Self + family

4. *Information*

5. *Self-Reflection*
Control + 13 Interventions

1. Framing
2. Norms
3. Future Self
4. Information: Can I anticipate what I’ll need or how I’ll feel?
   - Needs: Typical retirement income needs
   - Regret: Some retirees regret having claimed too early
5. Self-Reflection: Are my own thoughts persuasive?
   - Longevity: Consider implications of living long into retirement
   - Generate: Generate own reasons to postpone claiming
Intended Claiming Age
Do Different Interventions Have Different Effects for Different People?

- Examined a preregistered set of 23 interactions of treatment effects with individual differences
- Effects are largely homogeneous over these differences
  - Caveat: when full sample is in, estimates will be more precise
- Two interactions are statistically significant:
  1. Focus on **Future Benefits** increases intended claiming age more for people who are **less patient**
  2. Information on **Regret** increases intended claiming age more for people who are **less averse to losses**
  - Caveat: only 2 of 23 interactions
Implications

• Will these effects on intentions translate to effects on claiming?
  • If so, would implementations have momentary or persistent effects?

• Prominent numbers may act as apparent goals or targets
  • Effects will depend on latent claiming intention and benefits table

• Effects of treatment and correlations with individual differences suggest an opportunity for tailored tools
Step 1: Explore how your claiming age affects your Social Security retirement benefits

Enter your information below to see your estimated benefits.

Date of birth: 8/3/1990
Highest annual work income: $70,000

Your estimated benefits:
Select claiming ages on the graph to see how your estimated benefit changes.

Age 67 is your full benefit claiming age.

By age 85, an average lifespan, your total benefits will be $499,176 (in today’s dollars)

About your full benefit claiming age:
• It’s based on the year you were born.
• At this age, you will receive your full benefit with no reductions.

View estimated benefits as: monthly income annual income

Step 2: Learn tips specific to your situation

Picture your life in retirement to receive claiming tips.

Are you married?
Yes | No | Widowed

Do you plan to continue working in your 60s?
Yes | No | Not sure

Will your expenses decrease after you retire?
Yes | No | Not sure

Do you expect to have additional sources of retirement income beyond Social Security?
Yes | No | Not sure

Do you expect to live a long life?
Yes | No | Not sure
Thank you
stephen.spiller@anderson.ucla.edu