

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

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Key Findings and Policy Implications

This paper examines the effectiveness of various interventions designed to help consumers better reason about Social Security claiming age. The interventions test variations in payment framing, normative messaging, informational details, consideration of future selves, and self-reflection. The study also explores how people's responses differ by personality, demographics, financial literacy, thoughts about the future, risk tolerance, and attitudes toward Social Security. The paper finds that:

- The interventions designed to elicit self-reflection had the largest effect on Social Security claiming intentions. For example, when participants were encouraged to list their own reasons why deferred claiming might be better, their intended claiming age increased by an average of 10 months. When asked to consider what they would recommend for someone they knew, who would likely live to an old age, their intended claiming age increased by an average of six months.
- Four other interventions also resulted in respondents increasing the age at which they intended to claim benefits, each by an average of five to six months. One of them presented the gains in monthly benefits one would receive at each claiming age, relative to the earliest possible age of 62. Another provided information on the number of current Social Security recipients who, on reflection, wished they had waited longer to collect their benefits. A third provided explicit advice on what would be a "wise" choice. The fourth asked participants to imagine their future self, and how that future self would be affected by claiming age.
- Among personal characteristics, agreeableness, openness to experience, and emotional stability are each related to delayed claiming intentions. The better an individual's subjective health, the longer their life expectancy, and the more they expect to rely on Social Security, the later they intend to claim. The greater their self-reported financial well-being, the earlier they intend to claim. The greater their financial literacy, numeracy, and especially patience, the later they intend to claim.

Because the monthly Social Security benefit amount rises substantially by claiming later, the decision of when to claim has long-term implications for wellbeing through later life. While each person has their own considerations and priorities, claiming ages are also affected by the way the options are presented. This study provides new information on these effects.

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