

Séminaire Hospinnomics

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1 Parvis Notre-Dame, 75004 Paris

‘What is really ‘behavioral’ in behavioral health policy? And does it work?’

A review of the experimental evidence on risky health behavior’

Abstract:

Across different health systems, there is an increasing interest in applying behavioral economics insights to health policy challenges. Policy decision-makers in developed countries have recently discussed a range of diverse health policy interventions that are commonly brought together under a ‘behavioral’ umbrella. These include, among others: randomized controlled trials, comparison portals, information labels, financial incentives, sin taxes, and nudges. A critical overview is proposed to classify and assess such ‘behavioral’ interventions in the context of risky health behavior. First, operational definitions of ‘behavioral’ policy and ‘behavioral’ economics are proposed. Then, a preliminary distinction is made between ‘behavioral’ insights and experimental methods. A continuum spectrum of types of experiments is discussed for applications in health economics and policy. Next, a taxonomy is proposed that consists of five different ‘clusters’ of health policy interventions: i) preferences-based policies; ii) information-based policies; iii) financial incentives; iv) tax- and subsidy-based policies; and v) nudges. Finally, each cluster of health policies is then scrutinized under two respects: i) what are its genuine insights from ‘behavioral’ economics? ii) what experimental evidence does exist on its practical effectiveness? The discussion highlights the main challenges in drawing a clear mapping between the ‘behavioral’ content of each health policy cluster, and its actual effectiveness in changing health behavior.

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