DISPARITIES IN FINANCIAL LITERACY, PENSION PLANNING, AND SAVING BEHAVIOR

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Joint work with
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MOTIVATION

Recent trends in pensions:
(1) Shift in responsibility for retirement income to the individual level
(2) Increased complexity due to pension income from multiple sources

- Pension planning starts with **assessing the status quo** of pension claims, i.e. the retirement income individuals can expect given their current pension plans.
- Determining this status-quo may be a difficult task in a multi-pillar pension system.
- Digitalization is a way to make pension information more accessible.

Share of German households without supplementary old-age provision and by number of additional pensions
MOTIVATION

Recent policy initiatives to support individual pension planning:
- Germany: state-provided pension dashboard is expected to start in 2023
- UK: Pensions Dashboard in preparation for 2023
- Pension platforms active in Denmark (1999), Sweden (2004), Norway (2008), The Netherlands (2011)
- Brookings proposed the US to follow suit (John et al. 2020).

So far little empirical evidence on the effects of these platforms on pension planning and saving behavior.

Research question: Does simplifying pension information help individuals, in particular those with low financial literacy, to improve their pension planning behavior and affect saving for retirement?
**THIS PAPER IN A NUTSHELL**

**Goal:** Test the effect of simplifying pension information on retirement planning and saving decisions, in particular for individuals with low financial literacy.

**Treatment:** *Pension Dashboard* – digital application that provides field study participants with an aggregated overview of their accumulated future pension claims across all three pillars of the pension system – public, occupational, and private.

**Approach:** *Field experiment* in cooperation with two large German banks. Combination of unique data from up to three surveys, pension contract data, and administrative panel data on account balances and transactions pre- and post experiment from the cooperating banks.

**Main result:** Access to the dashboard decreases self-reported uncertainty about future retirement income and increases savings activity, in particular among the low financially literate.
LITERATURE

Selected works

- Financial literacy causally affects pension planning and wealth accumulation (e.g. Behrman et al. 2012, Lusardi and Mitchell 2008).
- Financial education has a causal effect on financial literacy and financial behaviors (Kaiser et al. 2022).
- Information affects saving and investment behavior (e.g. Beshears et al. 2015, Chan and Stevens 2008)
- Personal pension information (e.g. personal information letters, retirement income projections and general information materials) affect pension knowledge and saving behavior (e.g. Dolls et al. 2018, Goda et al. 2014, Mastrobuoni 2011)
THE FIELD EXPERIMENT

Timing and experimental groups

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Zero Touch Group</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Bank Data on Demographics, Account balances and other products (Jan. 16 – Aug. 17)</td>
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<tr>
<th>Control Group</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Survey I</td>
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<td>Bank Data on Demographics, (Retirement) Savings, Other Products (Jan. 16 – Aug. 17)</td>
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<td>Survey III</td>
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<th>Assigned to Treatment</th>
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<tr>
<td>Survey I</td>
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<td>Bank Data on Demographics, (Retirement) Savings, Other Products (Jan. 16 – Aug. 17)</td>
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<tr>
<th>Treatment Group</th>
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<tr>
<td>Survey I</td>
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<tr>
<td>Treatment: Dashboard</td>
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<tr>
<td>Survey II</td>
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<tr>
<td>Survey III</td>
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<tr>
<td>Bank Data on Demographics, (Retirement) Savings, Other Products (Jan. 16 – Aug. 17)</td>
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</table>

Jan/Feb 2017: Invitation to participate -> Click on website leads to Survey I (Pension characteristics)
Until June 2017 Registration for and Provision of Dashboards Survey II (Dashboard evaluation)
January 2018 Survey III (Changes in Pension Planning since Survey I)
THE FIELD EXPERIMENT - TREATMENT

- Personalized information about future pension income from all three pillars: public, private, occupational
- Aggregated overview of all accumulated future pension claims (gross and net of taxes)
- Presentation of guaranteed pension and possible additional income from profit participation / interest payments / pension increases
- Compilation of existing information
- Participants uploaded on average 4.5 products
- Average projected retirement income 3,287 € (std. 1,985 €)
- Effort: about 24 min per dashboard
IMPORTANT VARIABLES

Subjective pension overview
"I have a good overview over my accumulated pension entitlements today" (1=fully disagree to 7=fully agree) measured in Survey I and III

Saving balance
Savings account balance at the end of each month in Euros from administrative bank records for 12 months prior and up to 8 months after the intervention

Wealth
Wealth is equal to the sum of savings account, transfer account, and portfolio balances from administrative bank records and available for 12 months prior and up to 8 months after the intervention
IMPORTANT VARIABLES

Financial literacy

• Correct answers (one point per correct answer) to the Big Three financial literacy questions (Lusardi and Mitchell 2011, 2014)
  => 82% of the respondents with three correct answers
• plus a fourth more difficult question on compounding interest (Goda et al. 2014)
  => 43% correct answers
• In total 39% of the sample answer all four questions correctly
• Sample split: High literacy if all 4 questions answered correctly; low literacy if not all 4 questions answered correctly
## SUMMARY STATISTICS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Treatment</th>
<th>Control</th>
<th>Difference</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>0.29 (0.46)</td>
<td>0.34 (0.47)</td>
<td>-0.044</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td>47.84 (7.94)</td>
<td>43.92 (9.65)</td>
<td>3.920***</td>
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<tr>
<td>Single</td>
<td>0.35 (0.48)</td>
<td>0.43 (0.50)</td>
<td>-0.070*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Saving account</td>
<td>0.57 (0.50)</td>
<td>0.64 (0.48)</td>
<td>-0.071*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Active saving account</td>
<td>0.51 (0.50)</td>
<td>0.57 (0.50)</td>
<td>-0.055</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Savings balance in €</td>
<td>3,243 (12,134)</td>
<td>2,739 (10,280)</td>
<td>503</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wealth in €</td>
<td>24,207 (66,449)</td>
<td>21,296 (66,449)</td>
<td>2,911</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Financial literacy score</td>
<td>3.36 (0.69)</td>
<td>3.15 (0.85)</td>
<td>0.217***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pension overview</td>
<td>4.17 (1.68)</td>
<td>4.49 (1.96)</td>
<td>-0.315***</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Subjective pension overview:

- No change in the control group
- Significant improvement in the treatment group
AVERAGE SAVINGS BALANCES AN WEALTH

Saving balance (monthly in €)

Wealth (monthly in €)
EMPIRICAL STRATEGY

(1) DiD and (2) dynamic DiD:
Compare changes in saving balances and wealth before and after the treatment including time and individual fixed effects

\[ Y_{i,t} = \alpha_i + \lambda_t + \sum_{k=-12}^{7} \theta_k D_i^k P_i + \sum_{k=-12}^{7} \beta_k D_i^k T_i + \epsilon_{i,t}, \]

- Individual fixed effects
- Time fixed effects
- Time dummies interacted with a participation dummy (treat. + contr.)
- Time dummies interacted with a treatment dummy

Estimated for full sample and sub-samples of high and low financial literacy
EMPIRICAL STRATEGY - IDENTIFICATION

Self-selection into treatment
(1) Selection into participation => external validity
(2) Selection into treatment (compliance)
  • all differences in time-fixed unobservable characteristics are absorbed by
    the individual fixed effects
  • critical assumption: parallel trends => see estimation results later
  • Robustness: ITT (causal effect of a treatment offer) -- effect is likely to be
    small, because of a large group of individuals who were assigned to
    treatment but did not take up treatment (14.5% compliers).

Saving adjustments outside of saving accounts or outside the bank
• Similar effects for wealth (saving accounts are main driver of adjustments)
• Similar (or even larger) effects for subsample of active savers
• If there are large adjustments outside of the accounts with the main bank, then
  our estimates are very conservative.
### RESULTS: AVERAGE TREATMENT EFFECTS

Table 2: Average treatment effects for different wealth measures

| Dep. variable | All clients | | | | | | Active Savers | | | | | |
|---------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|
|                | (1)         | (2)         | (3)         | (4)         | (5)         | (6)         |                     |                     |                     |                     |                     |                     |                     |                     |
| Treatment Effect | 1,126.89 | 1,984.47 | 3,231.26 | 1,706.05 | 2,444.32 | 4,549.91* |                     |                     |                     |                     |                     |                     |                     |                     |
## RESULTS: AVERAGE TREATMENT EFFECTS

Table 2: Average treatment effects for different wealth measures

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<tr>
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<th>(1)</th>
<th>(2)</th>
<th>(3)</th>
<th>(4)</th>
<th>(5)</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>All clients</td>
<td>Active Savers</td>
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<tr>
<td>Dep. variable</td>
<td>Savings</td>
<td>Wealth</td>
<td>Net wealth</td>
<td>Savings and</td>
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<td>portfolio acc.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Panel A: Full sample</td>
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<tr>
<td>Treatment Effect</td>
<td>1,126.89</td>
<td>1,984.47</td>
<td>3,231.26</td>
<td>1,706.05</td>
<td>2,444.32</td>
<td>4,549.91*</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(1.16)</td>
<td>(0.99)</td>
<td>(1.26)</td>
<td>(0.88)</td>
<td>(1.56)</td>
<td>(1.91)</td>
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<tr>
<td>N</td>
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<td>11,846</td>
<td>11,846</td>
<td>6,392</td>
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<td>Panel B: Low financial literacy</td>
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<tr>
<td>Treatment Effect</td>
<td>3,354.13**</td>
<td>4,382.34**</td>
<td>6,202.38**</td>
<td>4,076.53**</td>
<td>5,018.68**</td>
<td>6,682.29**</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(2.38)</td>
<td>(2.05)</td>
<td>(2.11)</td>
<td>(2.00)</td>
<td>(2.16)</td>
<td>(2.03)</td>
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<td>7,270</td>
<td>7,270</td>
<td>4,188</td>
<td>4,188</td>
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<tr>
<td>Panel C: High financial literacy</td>
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<tr>
<td>Treatment Effect</td>
<td>-2,265.17</td>
<td>-2,410.17</td>
<td>-1,883.76</td>
<td>-2,557.09</td>
<td>-1,924.59</td>
<td>285.98</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(-1.56)</td>
<td>(-0.53)</td>
<td>(-0.37)</td>
<td>(-0.57)</td>
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<td>(0.09)</td>
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<tr>
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<td>2,204</td>
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<td>Month FE</td>
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<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Individual FE</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: *p < 0.05, **p < 0.01
TREATMENT EFFECTS OVER TIME

- Full sample
- Low Fin. Literacy
- High Fin. Literacy

β - Savings (Euro)

Month relative to first survey

-12, -11, -10, -9, -8, -7, -6, -5, -4, -3, -2, -1, 0, 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7

-2000, 0, 1000, 2000, 3000, 4000
TREATMENT EFFECTS ACTIVE SAVERS

Graph showing the trend of savings relative to the first survey for different groups:
- Full sample
- Low Fin. Literacy
- High Fin. Literacy

Savings (in Euro) over time (months relative to the first survey).
EFFECTS ON TOTAL WEALTH

The graph illustrates the changes in total wealth over time, segmented by financial literacy levels. The x-axis represents the months relative to the first survey, while the y-axis shows the savings (in Euros). The graph compares full sample, low financial literacy, and high financial literacy groups. Significant changes are marked with asterisks.
INTENTION TO TREAT EFFECTS

ITT (reduced from effect)  TOT - Treatment effect on the treated
ROBUSTNESS

1. Effects are robust
   • To using a measure of subjective financial literacy
   • To using alternative measures of wealth and savings

2. Effects are not driven by individuals who start looking for pension documents but fail to complete the process (dashboard effect instead of salience effect).

3. Trimming and Winsorization:
   • Trimming along average pre-intervention saving account balances
   • Trimming saving adaptions
   • Winsorizing monthly saving balances

=> Effects remain for 1%/99% cuts; but become weaker or insignificant for 5%/95% cuts.
CONCLUSION

- Access to the pension dashboard decreases uncertainty about future retirement income and increases savings and wealth.
- Effects are particularly strong among individuals with low financial literacy.

- Policy conclusion: Providing better pension information has the potential to mitigate retirement planning disparities.

- Caveat “External validity”: participants show relatively high average financial literacy, complex pension portfolios and high wealth and expected and pension income => known to have a relatively higher propensity to plan.
- Reaching individuals with low financial literacy and a low propensity to plan is a major challenge for policy makers and pension providers.
- More research is necessary how to reach those with low financial literacy and a low ex ante propensity to plan.
CONTACT

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SAVE the date: MIFE Annual Conference and Early Career Researcher Workshop will be held in Mannheim on Nov 20-22, 2023.

https://www.uni-mannheim.de/en/mife/