

Authors

Nava Ashraf
London School of Economics and Political Science

Oriana Bandiera
London School of Economics and Political Science

Scott Lee
Vanderbilt University

LOSING PROSOCIALITY IN THE QUEST FOR
TALENT? SORTING, SELECTION, AND
PRODUCTIVITY IN THE DELIVERY OF PUBLIC
SERVICES *

Nava Ashraf
Oriana Bandiera
Scott S. Lee
March 3, 2018

Abstract

We embed a field experiment in a nationwide recruitment drive for nurses in Zambia to test whether career benefits attract talent at the expense of prosocial motivation. We randomize the offer of career benefits at the recruitment stage. In line with common wisdom, treatment attracts less prosocial applicants. However, the trade-off only exists at low levels of talent: the marginal applicants in treatment are more talented and equally prosocial. These are hired, and they perform better at every step of the chain: they deliver more services, promote institutional childbirth, and reduce child malnutrition by 25% in the communities they serve.
JEL classification: J21, O15, M54, D92.

* Ashraf: Department of Economics, LSE, n.ashraf@lse.ac.uk; Bandiera: Department of Economics and STICERD, LSE, o.bandiera@lse.ac.uk; Lee: Harvard Medical School and Harvard Business School, sll@hbs.harvard.edu. We thank the Ministry of Health of Zambia and especially Mrs. Marinda Musumba for partnership on this project. We thank the IGC, IFAL Governance Initiative, USAID and HHS OPRED for financial support. We also thank Robert Akerlof, Charles Engelbrecht, Tim Hoxby, Robin Dizon, Paul Gertler, Edward Gibson, Kelsey Jack, Giacomo Pavesio, Emma Reed, Joseph Roach and seminar participants at several institutions for useful comments. Adam Grier, Amy Wernimpe, and Patricia Schumacher kindly provided guidance on psychometric scales. We thank Rishi Johnson, Christopher Okingo, Muelish Dossin, Muelish Huisman, Alister Kumbira, Allen Latham, Muelish Mubache, Elise Muna, Siyona Nkomo, Sam Lwiza, and Sealy Thai for the excellent research assistance and the Clinton Health Access Initiative in Zambia for their collaboration.

Losing Prosociality in the Quest for Talent? Sorting, Selection, and Productivity in the Delivery of Public Services

We embed a field experiment in a nationwide recruitment drive for nurses in Zambia to test whether career benefits attract talent at the expense of prosocial motivation. We randomize the offer of career benefits at the recruitment stage. In line with common wisdom, treatment

attracts less prosocial applicants. However, the trade-off only exists at low levels of talent; the marginal applicants in treatment are more talented and equally pro-social. These are hired, and they perform better at every step of the chain: they deliver more services, promote institutional childbirth, and reduce child malnutrition by 25% in the communities they serve.

February 05, 2019