

Result Report: Label Effects on Perceptions and Behaviors Toward Unhoused Individuals

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Abstract

This study investigates how inclusive labels, compared to stigmatizing terms, shape public perceptions and prosocial behaviors toward unhoused individuals. Drawing on theories of labeling and stigma, we hypothesized that person-centered labels (e.g., “people experiencing housing insecurity”) would reduce stigma and stereotypes (H1) and increase donations (H2). A preregistered online experiment with 400 U.S. adults tested these hypotheses using a between-subjects design. Participants viewed materials referencing either “the homeless” (stigmatizing label) or “people experiencing housing insecurity” (inclusive label). Results supported H1: PC labels significantly reduced stigma and negative stereotypes. However, H2 was unsupported, as donations did not differ between conditions. Stigma negatively correlated with donation amounts, but stereotypes showed no relationship. Exploratory analyses found no moderation by political orientation or age. These findings highlight the potential of PC labels to mitigate stigma, though additional strategies are needed to bridge the gap between attitudinal and behavioral change. Implications for advocacy, policy communication, and future research are discussed.

Keywords: Inclusive Language, stigma, homelessness, prosocial behavior, labeling effects

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Result

Hypothesis 1: Person-Centered Labels Reduce Stigma and Stereotypes

Stigma