

**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

## **Label Effects on Perceptions and Behaviors Toward Unhoused Individuals**

### **Introduction**

The way individuals are labeled—such as “the homeless” versus “people who experience housing insecurity”—can influence stigma, stereotypes, and charitable behavior. This study examines how different labels affect:

- Perceptions of homelessness-related stigma,
- Stereotypical judgments,
- Donation behaviors.

We hypothesize that:

1. Person-centered labels reduce stigma and stereotypes (H1);
2. Person-centered labels increase donations to unhoused group (H2);
3. Stigma and stereotypes predict donation amounts to unhoused group (H3).

### **Methods**

#### ***Participants***

A total of 399 participants were recruited. 9 participants were excluded due to failing attention checks. Thus the final sample size was 390.

#### ***Measures***

- **Stigma Perception** (6-item 5-points Likert scale)
- **Stereotypical Judgment** (8-item 5-points Likert scale) ([Fiske et al., 2002](#))
- **Donation Allocation** (Amount donated to homeless organizations out of three different organizations) See Table 1 for detailed measures and items.

### **Result**

#### **Person-Centered Labels Reduce Stigma and Stereotypes (H1)**

##### ***Stigma***

Stigma perception significantly differed by label  $F(1, 388) = 8.24, p = .004$ .

**Table 1**

*Main Measures*

	Measures	Items
<b>Survey Measures</b>	<b>Stigma</b> $N = 6$	[Label] are responsible for their condition
	<i>Likert (1-5)</i>	[Label] are dangerous
		It is better to be away from [Label].
	<b>Stereotypes</b> $N = 8$	How competent are [Label]?
	<i>Likert (1-5)</i>	How well educated are [Label]?
		How warmhearted are [Label]?
<b>Behavioral Measures</b>	<b>Donation</b> \$100	Covenant House - For [Label]
		Save the Children
		American Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to
		Animals (ASPCA)

*Note.* Stigma measures include: Responsibility, danger, social distance; Stereotypes measures include: Competence, warmth, status, competition.

***Stereotypes***

Stereotype perception significantly differed by label  $F(1, 388) = 7.43, p = .007$ .

***Stigma and Stereotypes Correlation***

Stigma and stereotypes were significantly correlated.

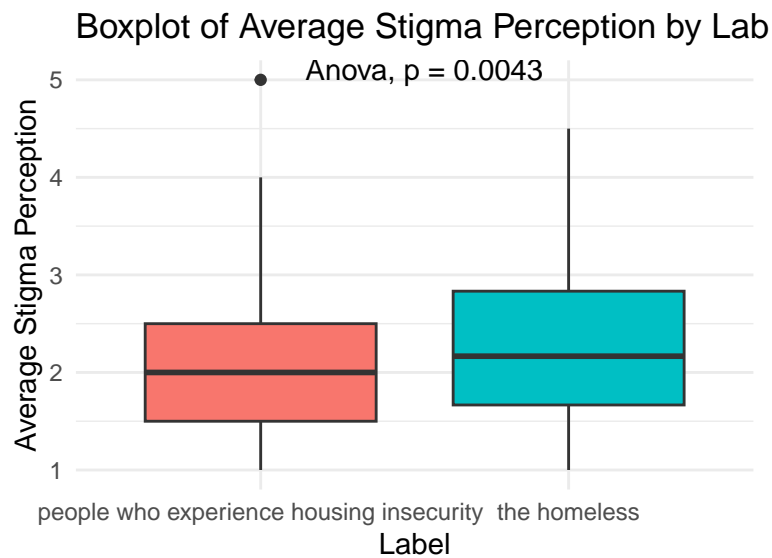
**H2: Person-Centered Labels vs. Donations**

***Donation Distribution***

Among the three organizations, average donation to the unhoused organization is the highest (report mean donation to unhoused) compared to children (report mean donation to children) and animal (report mean donation to animal) organizations. See figure...

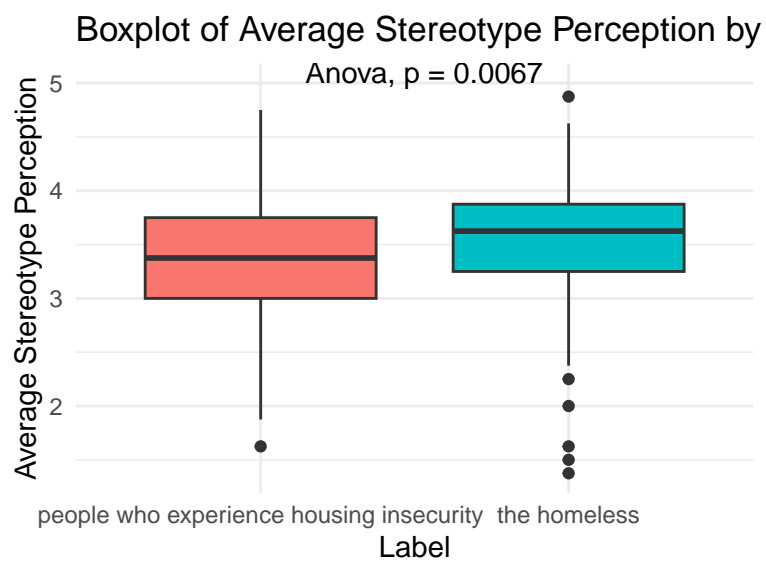
**Figure 1**

*Stigma: Conventional vs. Inclusive Labels*



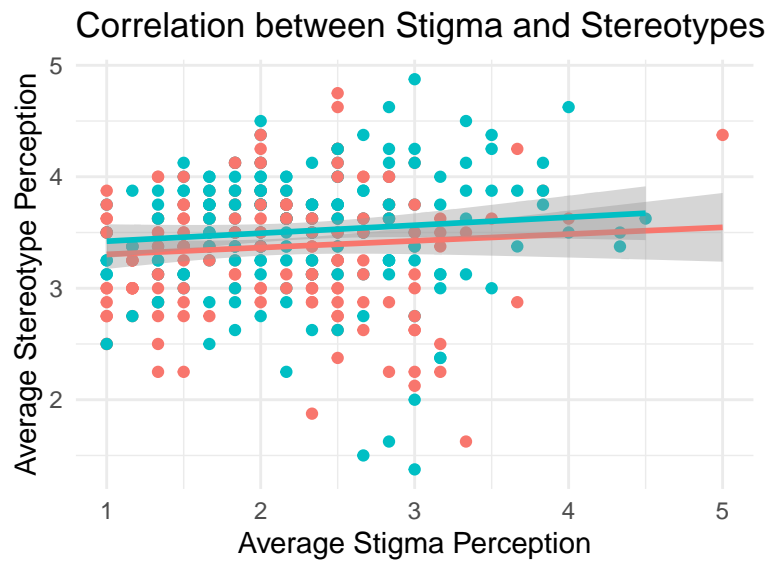
**Figure 2**

*Stereotype: Conventional vs. Inclusive Labels*



**Figure 3**

*Stigma vs. Stereotypes*



***Donation to Unhoused Org. by Label***

Donation, however, did not significantly differ by label  $F(1, 388) = 0.71, p = .402$ .

[report mean donation for unhoused org. by label]

**Stigma and stereotypes predict donation (H3)**

***Stigma and Donation***

Stigma perception is negatively correlated with donation amount. However, the relationship between stigma and donation did not differ by label.

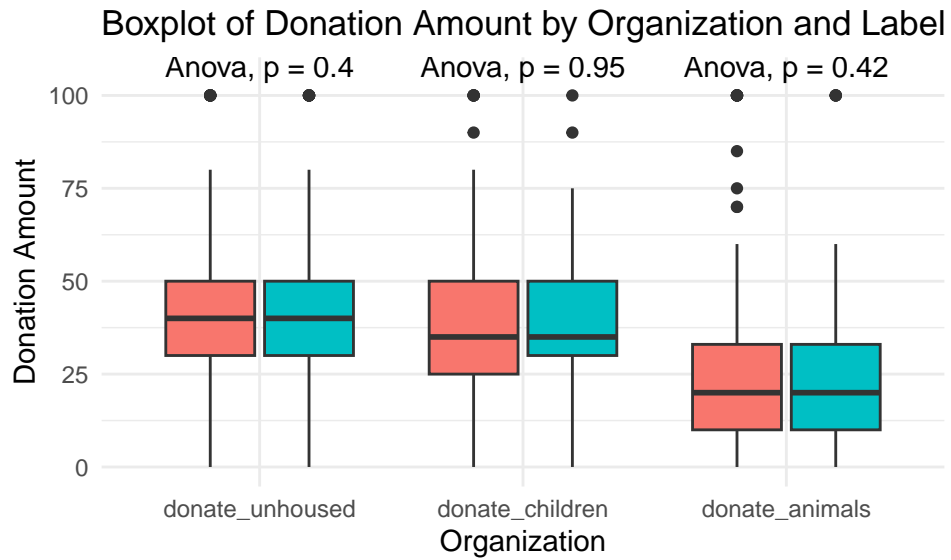
***Stereotypes and Donation***

Stereotype perception is not significantly correlated with donation amount.

***Exploratory Analysis***

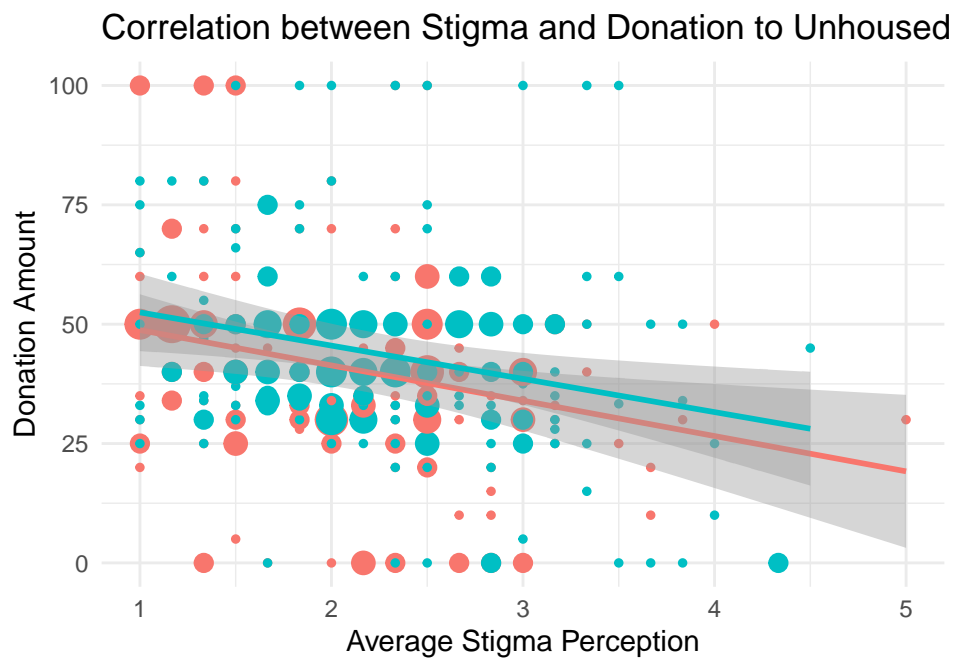
**Figure 4**

*Donation Distribution by Label*

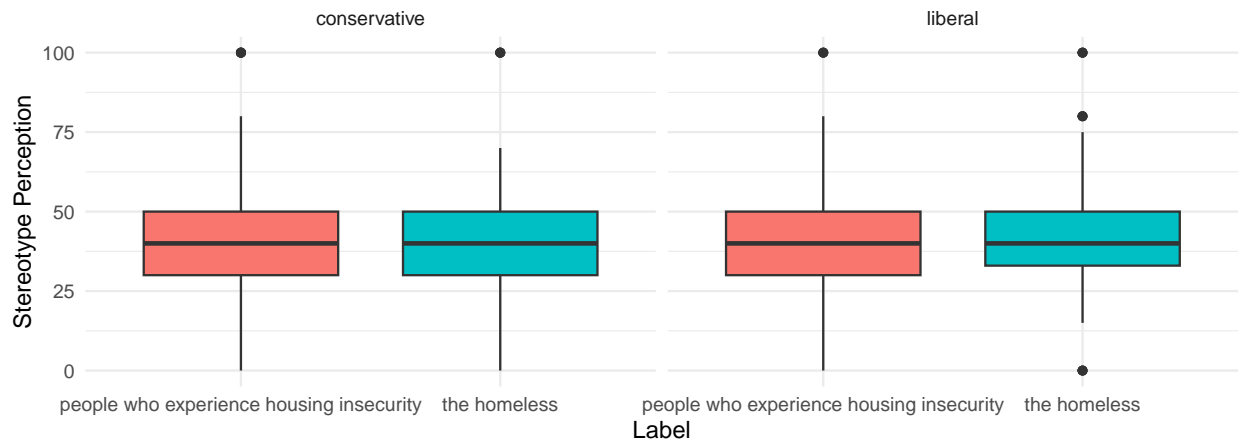


**Figure 5**

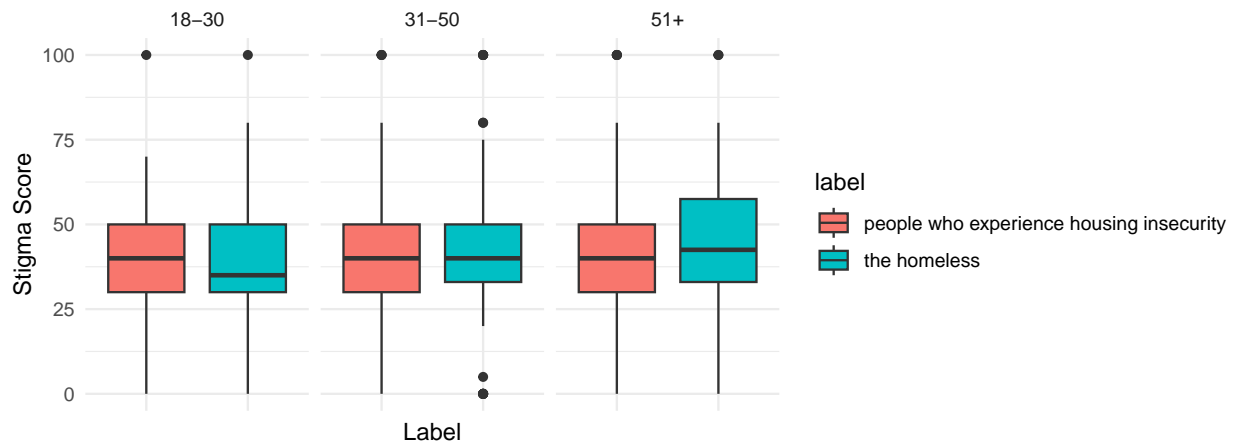
*Stigma vs. Donation*



**Figure 6**  
*Donation by Political Orientation and Label*



**Figure 7**  
*Donation by Age Group and Label*





### References

- Fiske, S. T., Cuddy, A. J. C., Glick, P., & Xu, J. (2002). A model of (often mixed) stereotype content: Competence and warmth respectively follow from perceived status and competition. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 82(6), 878–902.  
<https://doi.org/10.1037/0022-3514.82.6.878>