



METU Dept. of Business Administration
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“A Broad Look at Volunteer's Dilemma”

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Abstract

Volunteer's dilemma is an n-people binary choice game. One volunteer is enough to create a positive outcome which can be benefitted by all other players. Voluntary action is costly. If no-one volunteers, everybody gets zero payoff. Therefore, in order to receive a given benefit, at least one volunteer is needed. Social psychologists have been discussed this phenomenon for about 40 years under the term of “bystander effect”. Game theorists, after almost 20 years from the first paper on social psychology which discussed the bystander effect, came up with a game called “volunteer's dilemma.” While the literature agrees on that both bystander effect and volunteer's dilemma are reflecting the same social dilemmas, it is argued that there is an important difference between them and therefore we should be careful to employ the same solution concepts to both. Furthermore, common methodologies of experimental economics may not be suitable to study volunteer's dilemma and therefore, we should re-consider the common experimental procedures while doing experiments on volunteer's dilemma games. To test this argument, a pilot experiment involving 420 subjects is carried out. Econometric results support the argument and provides a ground to discuss how to test volunteer's dilemma with computerized laboratory methods.