

Benefits on the Bench: Workfare, Mental Health, and the Role of the Team

Remy Beauregard¹ & Carlos Brito¹

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¹Ph.D. candidate, University of California, Davis

Roadmap

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Research question: Can we deliver mental health benefits from work to labor demand constrained populations simply through team training and mission-alignment even for those not ultimately selected for work using an employment lottery?

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- Gain understanding of vulnerable and under-studied Venezuelan forcibly displaced population
- Contribute to development engineering and social policy on work provision and mental health

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- **Mental health as a critical input to labor supply and productivity**
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“Employment improves mental health at a magnitude four times greater than cash alone” - Hussam et al. (2022)

Team training

From working (“playing”) to eligible but (randomly) not selected (“on the bench”)

⇒ Can we deliver a sizable portion of mental health benefits from work to labor demand constrained populations simply through team training and mission-alignment even for those not ultimately selected for work?

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‘I trained with the team and felt part of the mission, and only due to random chance was not actually selected for working. I still feel good being part of something larger than myself’ - *hypothetical outcome*

Treatment arms

Randomizing work and team training:

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- Recent UCD IRB approval (ID: 2322902-1) of design

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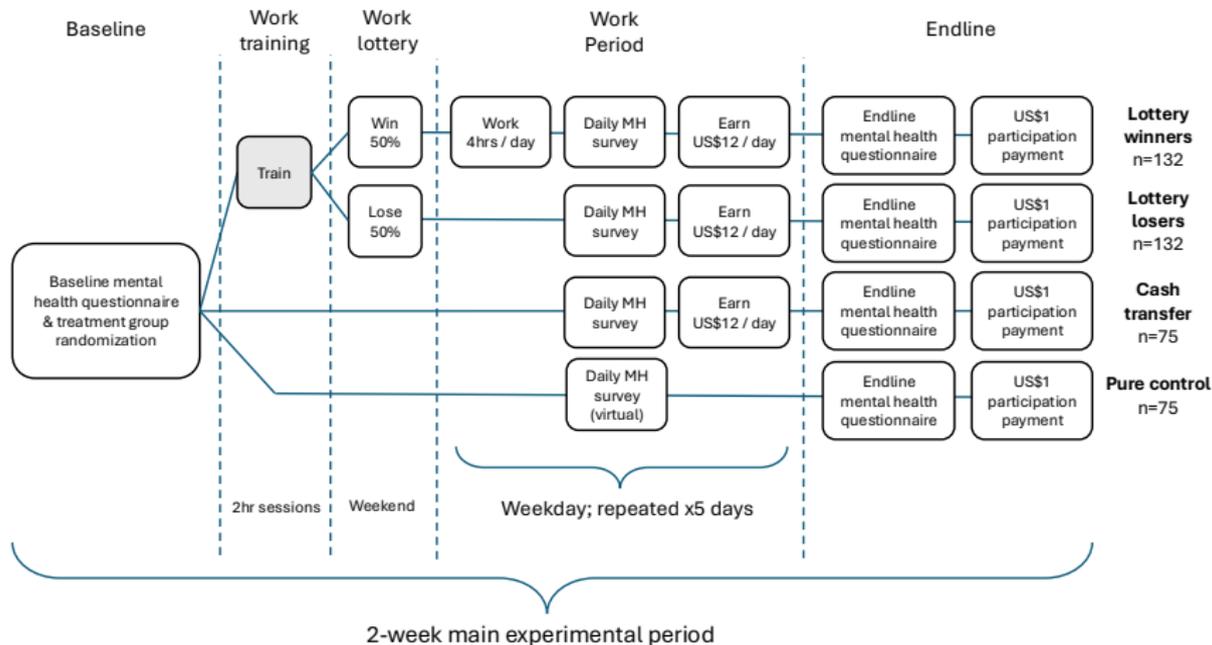
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- Small base payment B (US\$1.00) at the end of the experiment

Timeline of experiment



Treatment arms

$L = (\omega, 0.5; \neg\omega, 0.5)$	$L = \omega$ Lottery winner	$L = \neg\omega$ Lottery loser	CT Cash	PC Control
Working ω	Y			
Training S	Y	Y		
Daily payment M	Y	Y	Y	
Base payment B	Y	Y	Y	Y

Table: Treatment groups

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Mental health outcomes

Daily mental health surveys:

- Shorter, 0-10 indices
- Target general wellbeing, depression, anxiety, stress, sociability, etc.

Deeper baseline/endline mental health questionnaires:

- Psychologically validated inventories of depression, stress, anxiety, locus of control, etc.
- Augmented by economic and subjective wellbeing measures of individuals and households

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Venezuelan migrants in Roraima state, Brazil (Brito 2025)

- City of interest Boa Vista near Venezuelan border

²UNHCR (2021)

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- Familiarity with ordeals to receive support
- Key dimensions of heterogeneity: gender, indigenous status

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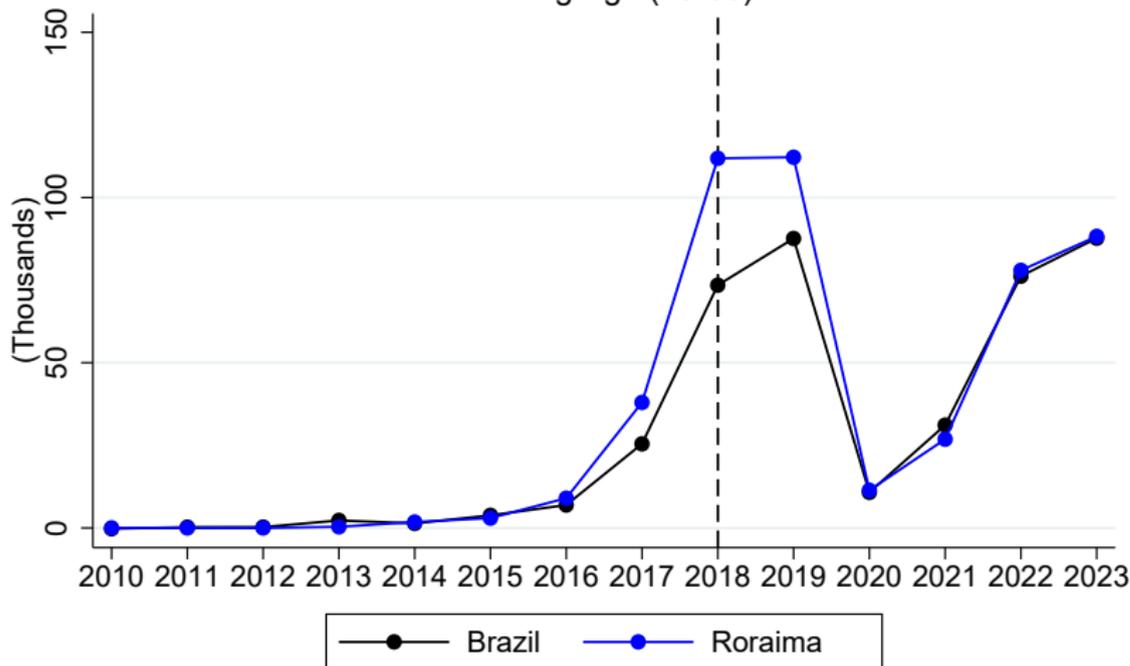
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Venezuelan Net Entrance Flow Working Age (15-65)



Source: Sistema de Tráfego Internacional (STI).

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Proposed work task: book binding page stacks

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- Offers variation in work purpose or *meaning* (next)

Meaningfulness

Should this offered work be *meaningful*?

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⇒ What can make work meaningful?

The role of the mission, corporate social responsibility (CSR), prosocial impact

- Beauregard (2025), Cassar and Meier (2018), Burbano (2016)

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- Combined treatments to maximize power:

$$\omega \in \{(N, Profit, Portuguese), (Y, Charity, Spanish)\}$$

⇒ Do the mental health benefits of team training and work change when the work provided is less meaningful, less charitable, less personal?

Hypotheses

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- Team training S produces positive mental health effects relative to CT arm: (2) vs. (3)

	(1) $L = \omega$	(2) $L = \neg\omega$	(3) CT	(4) PC
ω	Y			
S	Y	Y		
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Hypotheses

Hypotheses (future PAP/AEARCTR):

- Team training S produces positive mental health effects relative to CT arm: (2) vs. (3)
- Work completion ($L = \omega$) may also produce mental health effects relative to not completing work: (1) vs. (2)

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- More meaningful task (*Sign, Charity, Spanish*) produces stronger effects than less meaningful task (*Not sign, Profit, Portuguese*)

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- An informal labor market outside option necessitating ITT interpretation

Thank you!

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