Title: The Impact of COVID-19 and the Oncoming Recession on the ‘Bridge Jobs’ that Older Workers Take to Delay Retirement

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Abstract:
Given the aging population in most OECD countries, it is imperative to extend the work lives of older workers to reduce strain on Social Security and retirement systems. A common way that older worker extend their work lives is by taking temporary jobs (“bridge jobs”) as a way to ease into retirement, delay retirement, or temporarily leave retirement (“unretirement”) (Johnson, Kawachi, and Lewis 2009; Maestas 2010).

The COVID-19 pandemic, and ensuing recession, is poised to have a devastating effect on global economies. While recessions tend to disproportionately hurt older workers (Neumark and Button 2014), this pandemic and recession will likely have an even more disproportionate impact on older workers, especially those seeking bridge jobs. This disproportionate impact on bridge jobs will occur because bridge jobs are more likely to be lower-skilled and involve interactions with the public (e.g., retail sales). These jobs are likely to be the hardest hit, leading to the bridge jobs becoming even more unavailable during the COVID-19 pandemic and resulting recession than compared even to the recent, intense, Great Recession. COVID-19 also makes it less safe for older workers to work, making the impacts on older workers even more severe.

I seek to provide crucial early data and analysis to study the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic and ensuing recession on the economic outcomes of older workers in the United States, focusing on bridge jobs. While other labor economists are likely to also study how COVID-19 will affect older workers, my contribution will be more unique by studying bridge jobs, which are understudied despite being crucial to extending work lives. My other unique contribution is to leverage data sources that will provide data quickly, as detailed below.

Data description: Publicly available data from the Current Population Survey, Quarterly Census of Employment and Wages, and Job Openings and Labor Turnover Survey,

JEL codes for the project: J14, J26, J71,

Key-words: older workers, seniors, retirement, bridge jobs, age discrimination, recession, COVID-19, coronavirus, Social Security