

#### ABSTRACT

Discriminatory behavior in hiring decisions cannot be observed directly. Therefore, correspondence studies have been used, sending matched pairs of qualitatively identical applications to employers that have advertised a job opening. But correspondence studies do not give insight into the role of recruiter's characteristics on the selection and they often failed to consider individual differences in recruiters' tendency to discriminate. This study examines at what stage of selection discrimination occurs, dividing the process into three stages: the selection criteria, the assessment of the applicants' suitability and the decision to invite them for an interview. An online survey was conducted with professional recruiters in Switzerland. According to the methodology of correspondence test, professional recruiters evaluate two resumes with equivalent qualifications on the basis of the position to be filled. The resumes differ only by a gender and an ethnic minority marker. The study reveals biased practices based on gender and ethnicity in the third stages of the recruitment process (selection for interview). These results are relevant because biased decision making often remains invisible in resume screening. Several recommendations are discussed: training, anonymous resume screening, structured checklist, screening of recruiters and artificial intelligence support.

#### THEORY

The hiring discrimination hypothesis explains lower labor market outcomes of ethnic minorities or of females by means of prejudiced attitudes and reactions (Derous & Ryan, 2018). Discriminatory behavior in hiring decisions cannot be observed directly (Neumark, 2012). Therefore, correspondence studies have been used, sending matched pairs of qualitatively identical applications to employers that have advertised a job opening, the only difference being the signal of group belonging (name / gender of applicant). Group differences in outcomes are interpreted as reflecting discrimination. (Baert, 2017; Carlsson & Rooth, 2015; Pager & Western, 2012; Rich, 2014)

Discrimination is likely to be most pronounced at early stages of the employment relationship (hiring), when information about the applicant is at a minimum and when the chances of being caught are low (Pager, 2007). Studies have shown discrimination on different characteristics: nationality/ethnicity (Bertrand & Mullainathan, 2004; Carlsson & Rooth, 2007; Riach & Rich, 1991), gender (Neumark, Bank, & van Nort, 1996; Riach & Rich, 2006; Weichselsbaumer, 2004), family status (Corell, Benard, & Paik, 2007; Petit, 2007) or age (Bendick,

Brown, & Wall, 1999). But correspondence studies do not give insight into the role of recruiter's characteristics on the selection and they often failed to consider individual differences in recruiters' tendency to discriminate. Investigating individual's propensity to discriminate is important, however, as it may provide practical guidance on the selection and training of recruiters. Therefore, this study focuses on the impact of recruiter's characteristics on discrimination in hiring decisions.

This study examines at what stage of selection discrimination occurs. The selection process can be divided into three stages: i) The criteria that are important for a recruiter and to which he pays particular attention to (e.g. education vs. professional vs. gender / ethnic background), (ii) The assessment of the fit of the applicant's qualifications for the position, and (iii) the decision on the candidate to be invited for interview.

Due to social desirability (Dovidio & Gaertner, 2000; Plant & Devine, 1998), no direct discrimination is expected in the first step, the criteria that are important. No discrimination is also expected in stage two: Discrimination may affect ethnic minorities' or females' job suitability ratings when job applicant's qualification are moderately relevant for the job (creating ambiguity in the applicants' profile) whereas no effects are expected if applicants' qualifications are highly relevant for the job position (Talaska, Fiske, & Chaiken, 2008). However, it is assumed that the recruiter's attitudes and preferences have an influence on the selection of candidates. As prejudice and discrimination against women and ethnic minorities has become increasingly subtle and covert (Benokraitis & Feagin, 1986; Gaertner & Dovidio, 1986), modern forms of racism and sexism are particularly relevant here.

#### METHODS

An online survey was conducted with professional recruiters in Switzerland. Following the methodology of correspondence testing, professional recruiters receive a job advertisement for a position as a project manager and two resumes (Figure 1). They then evaluate two resumes with equivalent and thus exchangeable qualifications on the basis of the vacant position. For study 1 on ethnic discrimination, the recruiters receive two resumes with an ethnic marker, half of the group receives resume 1 with a domestic Swiss name and resume 2 with a name indicating migration background, the other half of the group vice versa. For study 2 on gender discrimination, the recruiters are treated in the same way with a gender marker.

#### Sample

The sample of study 1 and 2 comprises 110 recruiters each.

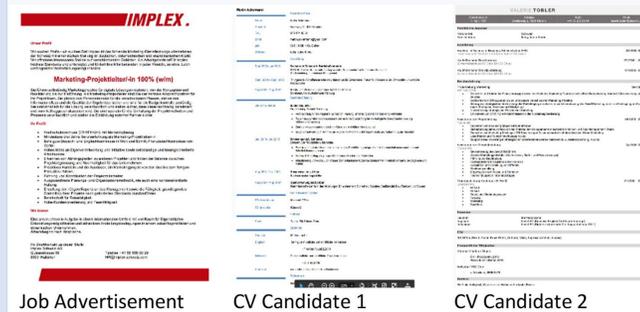


Figure 1 – Job Advertisement & CV Candidates

#### Measures

Recruiters use a 7-point Likert scale with 15 criteria concerning the resumes (e.g. academic career, professional experience, social skills, gender, origin, layout of the resume) and 13 concerning the selection process in general to indicate how relevant they are when selecting personnel and to assess the suitability of both candidates' qualifications for the position. The modern sexism and modern racism (9 items each) are measured with a 7-point Likert scale adapted from Swim et al. (1995) and Alba and Johnson (2000).

#### Analysis

Using an ANOVA, differences in the relevance of selection criteria as well as the fit of the qualifications to the job are analyzed. The influence of attitudes (modern racism / sexism) on selection is analyzed by a regression analysis.

#### RESULTS

In both studies, recruiters rated gender and ethnicity as very low selection criteria both in resumes as well as in interview, with no significant differences between candidate of resume 1 and 2. They also rated the job suitability of the qualifications of both candidates for the advertised position as high in both studies.

Regression Gender			Regression Ethnicity		
	Model 1	Model 2		Model 1	Model 2
Independent variables	Beta	Beta	Independent variables	Beta	Beta
Constant	–	–	Constant	–	–
Gender Recruiter (male)	-.022	-.145	Gender Recruiter (male)	.206 *	.180
Age	-.114	-.077	Age	.125	.144
Modern sexism		-.357 ***	Modern racism		-.220 *
R <sup>2</sup>	.012	.120	R <sup>2</sup>	.214	.305
Adj. R <sup>2</sup>	-.008	.093	Adj. R <sup>2</sup>	.026	.065
Δ R <sup>2</sup>	.012	.108	Δ R <sup>2</sup>	.046	.047
df	2	3	df	2	3
F-statistics	.588	4.409 ***	F-statistics	2.333	4.970 *
N	102	102	N	102	102
* p < .05; ** p < .01; *** p < .001 (2-tailed)			* p < .05; ** p < .01; *** p < .001 (2-tailed)		
Dependent variable: Gender selected candidate			Dependent variable: Ethnicity selected candidate		

Figure 2 – Regression Analysis

However, the regression analysis revealed a significant influence of modern racism in Study 1 and modern sexism in Study 2 on the selection of Swiss respectively male candidates for an interview (Figure 2).

#### DISCUSSION + RECOMMENDATIONS

The study reveals biased practices at the initial stage of the recruitment process based on gender and

ethnicity in the Swiss Labor Market. Recruiters' prejudice and attitudes affect their decision making.

These results are relevant because biased decision making in resume screening often remains invisible. Several recommendations can be deduced: i) Training: Organizations should train persons involved in the recruitment process with regard to unconscious bias. ii) Anonymous resume screening. As many studies demonstrate, applicant names are clear markers of ethnicity and gender. Anonymous resume screening has often been suggested to avoid bias (Krause, Rinne, & Zimmermann, 2011). iii) Structured checklist: Recruiters can implement a structured selection process with competence and experience checklists. iv) Screening recruiters: recruiters could be screened on their

tendency to discriminate. This can be difficult to implement, as those who check resumes can perform this role by virtue of their professional competence or recruitment power. v) Support with Artificial Intelligence (AI): The application procedures can be automated (Kerrin & Kettley, 2003). These screening processes have value in terms of reducing attention to ethnic and gender characteristics. In addition, equal quotas in terms of socio-demographic characteristics can be set for the shortlist. More recent techniques allow for screening and evaluation of the interview by AI and are a method to focus more on the applicant's personality.

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#### CONTACT

Dr. Nicoline Scheidegger  
ZHAW School of Management and Law - Switzerland  
snic@zhaw.ch