



Title: Why do some employers prefer to interview Matthew but not Samir? New evidence from Toronto, Montreal, and Vancouver

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Research Question:

Why do some Canadian employers prefer to interview Matthew but not Samir?

Importance:

In earlier work sponsored by Metropolis British Columbia (Oreopoulos 2009), thousands of resumes were sent in response to online job postings across Toronto to investigate why Canadian immigrants struggle in the labour market. The findings suggested significant discrimination by name ethnicity and city of experience. This follow-up study focuses more on better understanding exactly why this type of discrimination occurs, that is, whether this discrimination can be attributed to underlying concerns about worker productivity or simply prejudice and whether the behaviour is likely conscious or not. We examine callback rates from resumes sent to online job postings across multiple occupations in Toronto, Montreal, and Vancouver, and we interview recruiters to explain why they believe name discrimination occurs.

Research Findings:

Employers across Toronto, Montreal, and Vancouver significantly discriminate against applicants with common Indian and Chinese names relative to English names. The callback rate differences are larger in Montreal, while smaller in Vancouver. Name-based discrimination remains largely unaffected by including other indicators of language or social skills, comparing occupations that require less of these skills, and by using European names, more likely second-generation applicants, than Chinese or Indian names. Our quantitative evidence thus suggests productivity concerns cannot explain name bias. On the other hand, recruiters responded that employers often treat a name as a signal that an applicant may lack language or social skills. Together, these contrasting findings suggest a model of 'subconscious' or 'implicit' discrimination, where employers justify name and immigrant discrimination based on language skill concerns, but incorrectly overemphasize these concerns without taking into account offsetting characteristics listed on the resume. Pressure to avoid bad hires exacerbates these effects, as does the need to review resumes quickly.

Implications:

Masking names when deciding who to interview, and training recruiters to be more aware of possible bias, while considering better ways to discern foreign language ability may help improve immigrants' chances for labour market success.