

HIRING PRACTICES OF NORWEGIAN EMPLOYERS: How they changed after the 2011 terror attacks

After the terror attacks in Norway in July 2011, there was less discrimination against female job applicants with Pakistani names. That is the central finding of research by **Gunn Elisabeth Birkelund** and colleagues, to be presented to the NORFACE migration conference at University College London this week.

The study is based on two identical randomised field experiments of employers' hiring strategies in Oslo: the first undertaken in 2011 without knowledge of the upcoming terror and the second undertaken in 2012 after the terror attacks.

The results show that while there was discrimination against both male and female minorities in both experiments, employers were more likely to call female applicants with Pakistani names after the terror attacks than before. For male job applicants with Pakistani names, this was not the case.

The change may be explained by the fact that the terrorist, who killed 77 people, was an ethnic Norwegian, strongly opposed to immigration. This led to a flow of sympathy towards minorities in Norway, many of whom also were victims of the terror.

'It wasn't the Muslims; it was one of us...' was a typical comment. Three days after the terror attack, about 200 thousand took to the streets in Oslo in the famous *Rose toget*, collectively to embrace solidarity, cohesion, and peace.

Whether increased tolerance and solidarity in a population has any bearing on employers' hiring decisions is an open question. Even if employers' *attitudes* might be affected by the terror attacks, this does not necessarily imply that their *behaviour* would change.

To test this, the Norwegian research team performed two randomised field experiments. Matched pairs of résumés and cover letters, identical in all relevant employment characteristics and differing only in the names of the applicants (signalling different ethnic background), were sent to advertised vacancies. Significant differences in call-back rates between the candidates are interpreted as discrimination.

Pakistanis are the largest non-Western immigrant group in Norway, and the study includes only second-generation Norwegian-Pakistani immigrants, thereby eliminating poor language skills as an obvious discrimination factor. The research team tested if employers' call-back rates for minorities differed before and after the terror attacks.

Previous field experiments have shown that ethnic minority men are more discriminated against in the labour market than ethnic minority women. This study also shows that an exogenous shock, like the terror attacks, did not significantly affect employers' practices towards male job applicants with Pakistani names.

ENDS

'Did the Terror Attacks in Norway Change Oslo Employers' Hiring Practices?
Evidence from two field-experiments, before and after 22/7/2011' by Gunn Elisabeth
Birkelund, Arnfinn Midtbøen, Jon Rogstad and Elisabeth Ugreninov from the University
of Oslo, Institute for Social Research, Oslo and Fafo, Oslo