

ANONYMOUS APPLICATIONS FAIL TO HELP MINORITY WORKERS GET JOBS

Concealing the names, addresses and nationalities of job applicants in an effort to boost their likelihood of employment fails to have the desired effect. Indeed, according to research to be presented to the NORFACE migration conference at University College London this week, it actually harms minority candidates – those who are living in deprived neighbourhoods or who are immigrants or children of immigrants.

Bruno Crépon, Luc Behaghel and Thomas Le Barbanchon, researchers in the Crest and Paris School of Economics, conducted an experiment on the effectiveness of anonymous applications to reduce hiring discrimination in France in 2010.

Their unexpected results can be partly explained by selection of participants into the experiment. Firms that agree to participate may well practice ‘reverse discrimination’, in particular, discounting negative signals, such as unemployment spells, in minority resumes. Anonymous resumes prevent them from favouring minority candidates.

The experiment was designed to examine the conditions of implementation of a law passed in France in 2006, which was intended to make anonymous resumes mandatory for all firms with more than 50 employees. The law was finally abandoned in August 2011, partly because of the results of the experiment.

Thomas Le Barbanchon says:

‘Given the bulk of evidence on hiring discrimination in the French labour market, the results really came as a surprise. They show that some recruiters actually favour minority candidates, maybe because they ask for lower wages. Further research is needed to quantify the size of this group.’

In the experiment, 600 recruiters posting job offers through the French Public Employment service were randomly allocated either anonymous or standard resumes. The random allocation of recruiters to both types of resumes (treatment and control group) makes the results of the experiment very robust.

But firms could opt out of the experiment. Firms in the experiment seem to be more favourable to minority candidates than the average firm. This makes the results specific to the experiment.

When receiving anonymous resumes, recruiters call fewer minority candidates for interview and also tend to hire fewer of them. Anonymous resumes thus have the exact opposite effect to what policy makers-hoped. Anonymous resumes hindered recruiters from discounting certain negative signals readable in the resumes of minority candidates.

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Crest (Centre de Recherche en économie et Statistique) is an independent research centre in Paris area. Crest research focuses on the economic and social modelling and on statistical methods. For further information see: <http://www.crest.fr>