



Anonymous Job Applications: An International Perspective

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Background and Initial Situation

- ▶ **Hiring discrimination is still widespread** across the globe.
- ▶ Examples:
 - **USA:** Higher chances for candidates with white-sounding names to be invited for a job interview (Bertrand and Mullainathan 2004).
 - **Sweden:** Arabic-sounding names significantly reduce the chances of being invited for a job interview (Carlsson and Rooth 2007).
 - **Germany:** a Turkish-sounding name with the same qualifications reduces the chance of being invited to a job interview for an internship (Kaas and Manger 2012).
 - Other studies show, for example, clear disadvantages for married, childless young women in their search for part-time jobs (due to an assumed desire to have children; Becker et al. 2019) and for qualified female applicants with Turkish names and headscarves (Weichselbaumer 2016).



Sandra Bauer

18.8%



Meryem Öztürk

13.5%



Meryem Öztürk

4.2%

(Proportion of cases where the applicant was invited for a job interview)

Source: Weichselbaumer, Doris (2016). Discrimination against Female Migrants Wearing Headscarves. IZA Discussion Paper No. 10217. <http://ftp.iza.org/dp10217.pdf>

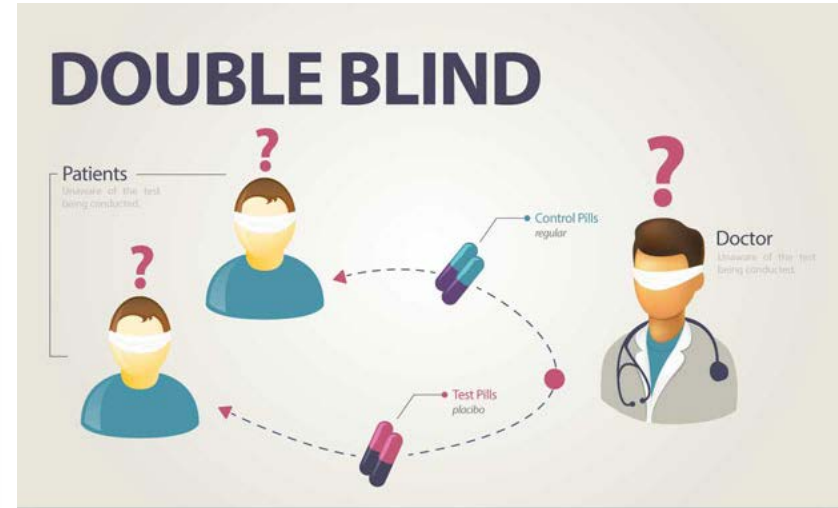
Anonymous Job Applications

- ▶ The aim is to **focus on qualifications and skills**.
- ▶ To achieve that goal, **anonymous job applications are typically without ...**
 - Picture, name, address, date of birth.
 - Age, gender, marital status, religion, place of birth.
- ▶ Apart from this, **all the usual information** is typically included in the application documents, such as work experience, education, motivation, etc.
- ▶ **After the decision whom to invite for personal interviews**, the identity of (successful) applicants is revealed.

Hypotheses and (Plausible) Assumptions

- ▶ **Discrimination is highest during the first stage of the application process**, i.e., when deciding whom to invite for personal interviews (Cediey and Foroni 2008).
- ▶ **Reservations and prejudices a smaller effect in and after a personal interview** when compared to a situation in which a decision is solely made based on written documents (Beaman et al. 2009).
- ▶ **Discrimination often occurs unconsciously** (Ziegert and Hanges 2005).

(Popular) Examples



- ▶ Experience shows that **it is generally possible to make decisions anonymously** and achieve the desired effects.

Image sources: blogs.wsj.com; gcumedia.com; cairo-symphony.com

Different Methods of Anonymizing Applicants' Data

- ▶ **Standardized application forms (recommended).**
- ▶ Suppress sensitive data in (online) application tools and systems.
- ▶ Transfer of the applicants' data into a standardized table.
- ▶ *Blackening standard documents (time-consuming and error-prone).*



Rinne, Ulf (2018): **Anonymous job applications and hiring discrimination.**

Blind recruitment can level the playing field in access to jobs but cannot prevent all forms of discrimination.

IZA World of Labor 2018: 48.

<https://wol.iza.org/articles/anonymous-job-applications-and-hiring-discrimination>

Overview: Evidence on Anonymous Job Applications (1/3)

- ▶ **France:** Randomized controlled experiment in the PES in 2010 and 2011. It involved about 1,000 firms with more than 50 employees that posted vacancies in the PES and that voluntarily joined the experiment.
- ▶ **Germany:** Two experiments.
 - In nationwide experiment (2010-2011) each of the eight public and private organizations that voluntarily joined the experiment agreed to review anonymous applications in specific departments for different types of jobs.
 - In a regional experiment (2013, in the federal state of Baden-Württemberg) eleven mostly smaller organizations that voluntarily joined the experiment agreed to review anonymous applications for specific vacancies.

Overview: Evidence on Anonymous Job Applications (2/3)

- ▶ **The Netherlands:** Two experiments in the public administration of one major Dutch city in 2006 and 2007 (at the department level).
- ▶ **Sweden:** Two experiments.
 - One experiment, conducted at the PES, introduced an online database of applicants in 1997 and applicants could voluntarily choose to exclude their name and gender from the information provided to potential employers. However, this feature might involve non-random sorting, because volunteers are very likely to be those who fear negative discrimination.
 - In a second experiment, conducted in parts of the local administration of Gothenburg during 2004-2006, anonymous job applications were introduced in some districts, while another district served as the control group.

Overview: Evidence on Anonymous Job Applications (3/3)

- ▶ **Canada:** A pilot project (2017) involved 17 public sector organizations. External applicants for federal jobs were assessed based on either anonymous or traditional application documents in the initial screening stage. Whether applications were redacted, and personal information rather comprehensively anonymized, was randomly assigned.
- ▶ **Australia:** Randomized experiment (2016). Participants were public servants from 14 organizations who were asked to shortlist hypothetical applicants for a senior position in their agency. Their decisions were either based on standard applications or anonymized (de-identified) applications. In the latter case, information about gender, race, and ethnicity was removed.

Main Results and Findings

- ▶ In most studies, **after the introduction of anonymous job applications, no systematic differences in the probability of invitation remain** between comparable applicants from different population groups (important exception: experiment in France).
 - However, any effects of the introduction **depend on the respective initial situation** in the company (clearly positive effects only occur if there was discrimination before).
- ▶ **Standardized application forms** have proven to be a practicable and recommendable method of anonymization (“second-best solution”).
 - Improved **comparability** and higher **information content**.
 - **Additional time** required to prepare the form.
 - Decrease in the **number** of applicants with higher average **quality**.

Potentials and Limits of Anonymous Job Applications

- ▶ The **selection of organizations in pilot projects / experiments was often *not* representative** (previous experience in diversity management).
- ▶ **Discrimination** could still take place **in a later application stage** (e.g., interview stage).
- ▶ **Contextual applicant information** could be interpreted differently.
- ▶ It is **not necessary to invite more applicants**.
- ▶ **Personal interests, voluntary work, hobbies and interests as well as motivation** can and should be elements of an anonymous job application.
- ▶ Increased **legal certainty** with regard to anti-discrimination laws.
- ▶ **Credible signal by employers** for equal opportunities in the application process.
- ▶ **Selective use** of anonymous job applications?

Conclusion and Outlook

- ▶ When implemented effectively, anonymous job applications ensure **equal opportunities** by **focusing on the qualifications and skills** of applicants.
- ▶ However, they can **only be one aspect of diversity management**. For example, upstream and downstream **structural differences** (such as in education or with respect to promotions) cannot be compensated for, **nor can anonymous job applications be meaningfully implemented for all vacancies**.
- ▶ It is generally desirable to make **selection processes more transparent and objective** (e.g., with predefined, clear and comprehensible evaluation criteria).
- ▶ **Digital anonymous job applications?** (e.g., selection by “neutral” algorithms, anonymous online tests in the first stage of the procedure?).



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