



French employers biased against Muslim applicants, research says
UK and wider European study plans to look for similar labour market bias

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<http://www.peoplemanagement.co.uk/pm/articles/2010/11/french-employers-biased-against-muslim-applicants-research-says.htm>

French employers “strongly discriminate” against Muslim job applicants in the labour market, scientific research has revealed.

A team of researchers led by Stanford University Professor David Laitin sent 275 pairs of fake job applications to French employers with identical qualifications and experience. The main difference was that one CV had a traditionally Christian first name, Marie, while the other had a Muslim first name, Khadija. Both fictional characters had the Senegalese surname Diouf, which researchers said meant the findings were focused on religion rather than race.

Applications with a Christian first name were more than two and a half times more likely to receive a response from a French employer than a the CV with a Muslim name.

The report’s authors said employers could be trying to recruit people similar to themselves to avoid the perceived risks of taking on an "unknown quantity". Or there could be a more active discrimination against hiring Muslims based on subjective bias, they said.

One of the report’s authors, Dr Marie-Anne Valfort, said: "What is surprising is the intensity of the discrimination. If anything we have underestimated it, partly because we made the job applicant female and we know that Muslim males face higher discrimination," she said.

The report, *Identifying barriers to Muslim integration in France*, was published in the *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences*.

Next the research team plan to examine potential prejudice against Muslim jobseekers across Europe, including in the UK. Official ONS figures obtained by People Management show that Muslim unemployment in the UK is 16.4 per cent, significantly more than the rest of the population.

In October 2009, controversial UK government research found that jobseekers in Britain with African or Asian sounding names had to apply for 16 jobs before getting an interview, while applicants with ‘white’ names only had to apply for nine. This research sent out nearly 3,000 fictitious CVs to assess the levels of discrimination.

Sandra Kerr, national campaign director at Race for Opportunity (RfO), said that the DWP research, with its broader examination of discrimination, had already revealed similar

prejudices to the French study exist in the UK.

“A number of employers are taking this issue quite seriously and giving staff, recruitment teams and senior people discrimination awareness training,” said Kerr.

“But prejudice is quite often under the surface. Most people would say: ‘I’m not biased, I don’t discriminate at all’ but awareness training aims to trigger the understanding that everybody has some sort of bias.”

She added that studies like the Muslim names research demonstrated how discrimination can manifest itself at an early stage. “But it doesn’t begin to deal with how it may occur at different stages of the recruitment process.”

She added that nameless CVs, which allow the applicant to remain anonymous, could help, however she said they were “only a small bit of the solution”.