

Employers discriminate against Muslims, study finds

By Steve Connor, Science Editor

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Muslims face "massive discrimination" when applying for jobs, according to the first scientifically validated study of anti-Muslim bias among employers in France.

Researchers now want to study whether there is a similar bias in Britain, where unemployment among Muslims is higher than in any other religious group.

The French study found that a fictional job applicant with a traditionally Christian first name was more than two-and-a-half times more likely to receive a response from a potential French employer than an identical applicant with a Muslim name.

The scientists who carried out the research believe the highly significant difference in response rates was entirely due to the perceived religious affiliations of the job applicant rather than any prejudice connected with differences in race, age or gender.

The unemployment rate among British Muslim men is around 13 per cent, which is approximately three times higher than the rate among men belonging to other faiths. Young Muslims are at even higher risk of being unemployed. Muslims aged between 16 and 24 have the highest jobless rates of any group and are more than twice as likely to be unemployed compared to Christians of the same age, with a jobless rate of 28 per cent compared with 11 per cent, according to the Office of National Statistics.

The study in France may explain why Muslims in European countries are more likely to be without jobs than members of other religions. It attempted to eliminate the possibly confounding prejudices of race by concentrating on second-generation Senegalese immigrants to France, who can be either Muslim or Christian.

The researchers, led by David Laitin of Stanford University in California, created and mailed out 275 pairs of résumés to French employers advertising for jobs. Each of the paired résumés was identical in terms of job qualifications and experience except for the names of the applicants.

One of the applicants had a Christian given name, "Marie Diouf", while another had a Muslim given name, "Khadija Diouf". To emphasise the religious difference in the applicants, Maire Diouf said she worked for Catholic Relief and was a member of Christian scouts, and Khadija Diouf said she had worked for Islamic Relief and was a member of Muslim scouts.

As a scientific control, the researchers compiled a third fictional résumé in the name of "Aurelie Menard", who could be identified as a rooted French person with no assumed religion – unlike "Diouf" which in France is easily identified as a Senegalese name. Every employer received a résumé of Aurelie Menard with a résumé of either Marie Diouf or

Khadija Diouf – employers may have detected a test if they received applications from both Marie and Khadija Diouf, researchers said.

Marie-Anne Valfort from the Sorbonne in Paris said Khadija Diouf received a response rate of 8 per cent while Marie Diouf's response rate was 21 per cent – a highly significant difference. "It amounts to massive discrimination. The agenda is to try to find out what is driving it," Dr Valfort said.

One possibility is that the employers are trying to recruit people similar to themselves to avoid perceived risks of taking on an "unknown quantity". Another suggestion is that there is a more active discrimination against hiring Muslims based on subjective assessments of "distaste", Dr 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 study is published in the journal Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences.