

Avoiding, perceiving or responding to ethnic discrimination in the hiring process: a longitudinal study of job searches

Aim: To understand: 1) whether and how members of disadvantaged groups try to avoid discrimination while searching for jobs; 2) under which conditions they interpret employers' reactions as fair or discriminatory; 3) whether and how they adapt their job search strategies in reaction to perceived discrimination.

Theoretical background:

Ethnic discrimination in the labour market is persistent and pervasive. As demonstrated in many field experiments, job applicants with an ethnic minority background have to apply significantly more often than the majority group to receive an equal number of positive call-backs from employers. Previous research, however, has long neglected the job search behaviour of members of vulnerable groups and the strategies they may adopt to avoid discrimination. For example, ethnic minorities may conceal ethnic cues when applying for jobs, broaden their search to maximize employment chances, or narrow their focus to organizations that they perceive as more meritocratic. These job search strategies have received little attention in the literature.

The key contribution of this PhD project is to analyse the job search behaviour of disadvantaged groups as it unfolds over time. Do members of ethnic minorities anticipate to be targets of discrimination? Which type of organizations do they apply to and how do they react to signals of organizational diversity and inclusion? Do they interpret rejections and unsuccessful searches as evidence of discrimination? To what extent, and how, do they adapt their search behaviour in response to episodes of perceived discrimination? We will combine the sociological and socio-psychological literature on stigmatization, social identity and discrimination, with the organizational psychology literature on job search to examine the identity management and coping strategies of vulnerable groups as they try to find employment.

Research design:

We will collect real-time longitudinal data on the job search behaviour of ethnic minorities in the Dutch labour market, comparing job seekers of European and non-European descent, and study how their job search evolves over time. Using experience sampling methods (also known as event sampling methods or daily diaries), we will track the type of organizations that job seekers apply to, how job seekers react to the information reported in the vacancies and the feedback received from employers and whether they adapt their job search strategies

in response to perceived discrimination or expectations of success and failure. Experience sampling is suitable to measure events as they occur naturally in daily life, thus avoiding problems of post-hoc rationalization or recall bias. We will also design targeted survey experiments to test how job seekers react to signals of pro diversity policies and inclusive organizational climate. Longitudinal quantitative analyses of repeated measurements will reveal within-individual variation in job search strategies and discrimination attributions.

Project: This project is part of a larger ERC-funded project ('TARGETS') on ethnic discrimination in the labour market. Combining insights from sociology, social and organizational psychology, sociolegal and organizational studies, TARGETS approaches the study of ethnic discrimination from a multi-actor and dynamic perspective.

Literature:

- Kang, S. K., DeCelles, K. A., Tilcsik, A., & Jun, S. (2016). Whitened résumés: Race and self-presentation in the labor market. *Administrative Science Quarterly*, 61(3), 469-502.
- Ruedin, D., & Van Belle, E. (2022). The Extent of Résumé Whitening. *Sociological Research Online*, 13607804221094625.

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