

Asian job seekers face disadvantage even when they have higher degrees, study finds

A new Canadian study found job applicants with Asian names and a master's degree got fewer interview requests than counterparts with Anglo-Canadian names and only a bachelor's degree.



Paul Nguyen, who was born in Canada to Vietnamese immigrant parents, said he has seen better-educated visible minorities with foreign credentials passed over for promotion. (AARON HARRIS / TORONTO STAR FILE PHOTO)



Jeffrey Reitz, a sociology professor at the University of Toronto and co-author of the new study, said the findings call for the adoption of what's known as an anonymized resumé review process, which codes candidates without identifying them by name. (CARLOS OSORIO / TORONTO STAR FILE PHOTO)

By **NICHOLAS KEUNG** Immigration reporter
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Job candidates with Asian names and Canadian qualifications are less likely to be called for interviews than their counterparts with Anglo-Canadian names even when they have a better education, [a new study](#) has found.

Using data from a recent large-scale Canadian employment study that examined interview callback rates for resumé with Asian and Anglo names, researchers found Asian-named applicants consistently received fewer calls regardless of the size of the companies involved.

Although a master's degree can improve Asian candidates' chances of being called, it does not close the gap and their prospects don't even measure up to those of Anglo applicants with undergraduate qualifications.

Compared to applicants with Anglo names, Asian-named applicants with all-Canadian qualifications had 20.1 per cent fewer calls from organizations with 500 or more employees, and 39.4 per cent and 37.1 per cent fewer calls, respectively, from medium-sized and small employers.

"The disadvantage of an Asian name is less in the large organizations, although it has not disappeared," said the joint study by the University of Toronto and Ryerson University, titled "Do Large Employers Treat Racial Minorities More Fairly?" It will be released Wednesday at a forum at U of T's Munk School of Global Affairs.

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The challenge, the report said, is that more than 70 per cent of private sector employees in Canada work for companies with fewer than 100 employees.

Paul Nguyen, 36, who was born in Canada to Vietnamese parents, said he was not surprised by the findings, as he has seen first-hand how a visible minority colleague with a doctoral degree was passed over for promotion in favour of a Caucasian with a bachelor's degree.

In fact, Nguyen's parents decided to change his name to Paul when he was in Grade 8 because his original name, Phuong, was frequently misspelled or mispronounced.

"It just makes it easier for me to navigate in the system," he said.

The new study follows earlier research led by University of Toronto economics professor Phil Oreopoulos, who found that for every 100 calls received by applicants with Anglo names, applicants with Asian names got only 72. However, his study did not break down company size and occupational skill level.

The applicants in the study had fictitious names that were English (Greg Johnson and Emily Brown), Chinese (Lei Li and Xuying Zhang), Indian (Samir Sharma and Tara Singh) and Pakistani (Ali Saeed and Hina Chaudhry).

Researchers in the current study further dissected Oreopoulos's data, which was collected from a field audit that involved sending 12,910 invented resumé to employers for 3,225 real job postings.

Using a standard occupational status scale, researchers classified the job postings into high-skill positions such as accountant, civil engineer or sales and marketing manager; average-skill jobs such as financial adviser and claims adjuster; and lower-skill jobs that included bookkeeper, accounts payable clerk, restaurant manager or cashier.

While the study found the extent of discrimination against Asian-named applicants with all Canadian qualifications was roughly the same for both high-skill and lower-skill jobs (32.9 per cent less likely to get a call versus 30.7 per cent), skill level mattered much more when the Asian-named candidates have some foreign qualifications.

Whereas the Asian-named applicants overall had about a 53.3-per-cent lower chance of getting a call for an interview if they had some foreign qualifications, this rate rose to 58.5 per cent for applicants to high-skill jobs, and fell to 45.7 per cent if the openings were for lower-skill jobs.

"The less favourable response to Asian-named and foreign-qualified applicants at higher skill levels may arise because in those jobs, more is at stake in the credential assessment, so avoiding the issue by not calling is seen as the safer option," said the study.

Researchers went one step further by looking at how Asian-named applicants with higher levels of qualifications fared compared to Anglo-named candidates with lower qualifications.

For Anglo applicants citing a master's degree in resumé, the study found, the chance of an interview improved from 69.9 per cent to 81 per cent, or 11.1 percentage points — about the same percentage point increase as for their Asian counterparts (from 45.9 per cent to 56.5 per cent).

Although the positive effect of the extra education was notable, it was not enough to offset the overall disadvantage of having an Asian name. The callback rate for Anglo applicants without the additional degree was still 13.4 percentage points higher than for their Asian counterparts with the additional degree (69.9 per cent versus 56.5 per cent).

Jeffrey Reitz, a co-author of the current study and sociology professor at the Munk School of Global Affairs, said the findings call for the adoption of what's known as an "anonymized resumé review" process — coding candidates without identifying their names — by Canadian employers.

"Some people are concerned this is something we are doing to accommodate minorities, giving an advantage to minority people by deferring to them," said Reitz. "But no matter what political correctness is doing, it is not offsetting the problems."

Blind recruitment can have a huge impact on eliminating some of the employers' biases, as in the case of the [Toronto Symphony Orchestra when it began auditioning musicians behind a screen](#) in 1980, according to a CBC report. The orchestra today is almost half female and more diverse than in the 1970s, when it was dominated by white men.

Rupa Banerjee, another co-author of the paper and a professor at Ryerson University's Ted Rogers School of Management, said she is not aware of any Canadian employers using blind recruitment practices.

Legislation such as employment equity measures will not eliminate name discrimination, which can only be addressed through education and training of hiring managers, she said.

"A name matters because it draws on implicit response and activates stereotypes on what a job candidate would be when you only have less than seven seconds to look at a resumé. People judge by the name they see," said Banerjee.

"Anonymized resumé reviews can't eliminate discrimination completely. That's just the initial hurdle. When you go into an interview, you can't hide who you are and remove your ethnic markers."

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