

STUDY SHOWS UNEMPLOYED CANDIDATES FACE JOB DISCRIMINATION



Geoffrey C. Ho is a doctoral candidate at UCLA's Anderson School of Management. Ho is the co-author of a research paper that discusses the thoughts of potential employers when it comes to unemployed job candidates despite how long they have been without a job. The paper also notes that it does not matter if the employees quit the job on their own or if they were laid off because of budget problems. "Although it has long been theorized that the simple fact of being unemployed carries a stigma, the idea has never really been tested outside some studies by economists who have focused on the duration issue. We found bias against the jobless, among human-resource professionals as well as among the broader public, virtually from the outset of unemployment," Ho said. For six months or more, over 5 million Americans have been without a job. The team Ho worked with surveyed 47 human resource professionals by asking them to review resumes that were completely identical except for one aspect; half of the resumes were for people who were unemployed for one month and half were for those who were employed. The survey shows that the worker who was currently employed received higher marks for the ability to be hired and for competence. Ho and his team conducted another experiment, this one featuring students who had to look over resumes that were identical except for the fact that half were for employed people and half were for unemployed people. The unemployed group of resumes was placed into two sections; those who voluntarily left their jobs and those who had been laid off by their companies. The group of "laid off" people did not score higher than those who voluntarily left their jobs. "Those two words by themselves don't elicit any more sympathy than 'left voluntarily,'" Ho said. Ho said that a third experiment conducted by the team discovered that job candidates who had employers that had to shut down garnered higher amounts of sympathy. "What does allay people's bias is some explicit indication that losing your job was not your fault -- for example, that the company went bankrupt or suffered some specific setbacks that made layoffs inevitable," Ho said. Ho's research team consisted of Daniel J. Walters and Margaret Shih from UCLA Anderson and Todd Lowell Pittinsky from Stony Brook University. The article that discusses the survey is called "The Psychological Stigma of Unemployment: When Joblessness leads to Being Jobless." It is scheduled for publication on August 5 at Academy of Management annual meeting.

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