

An Experiment: Hiring Discrimination on Appearance, Especially on Women

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ABSTRACT

It's a common phenomenon that appearance discrimination occurring in Hiring condition, however, in China, things are a little different. Compare to other countries' gender gap decreased gradually, the difference of gender in China kept rising. An experiment was built up in this article, both implicit and explicit bias were measured and discussed: made-up resumes were sending to hiring managers and callback rates were recorded, then questionnaires were sending to hiring managers for IAT test result as well. The both result were been discussed and possible future plan were proposed on appearance discrimination when it comes to hiring condition, especially, when it comes to women.

Keywords: *Appearance discrimination, obese females, gender gap.*

1. INTRODUCTION

Discriminations could occur from varieties aspects, it's so easy to have stereotypes/prejudice on people who have different colour, who come from different nation, different gender, or even could just because of people is late for working. It's quite shocking that stereotypes could vary people's performance in such a way. Appearance anxiety has already become a common phenomenon not only in China but worldwide: Korean/German women had reported higher level of body shame and appearance anxiety, in addition, body dissatisfaction and eating disorders were always relevant and may cause health problems [1]. What's public's attitude about people's appearance? Based on an observational study's poll results in China (n=17,702), 75% young people (under the age of 33) believed being more attractive would bring them more or less competitiveness in the society, what's more, 51.3% of them responded that they have considered doing facelift some day [2].

The situation is, men's body fate percentage are much lower than women's, men with larger weight could be acknowledged lighter than women when they actually are in the similar weight, therefore, the problem occurs, the requirements on women's weight are stricter than men would be asked for. Adult obesity rate stands 42.4% in US, which had increased by 26% since 2008, and this was the very first time the national rate had passed 40% [3]. Social-economic factors could give rise to this result, such as poverty and discriminations, which was a

thought-provoking causation. Would hiring discrimination include obesity and end up with unfair treatment, which unfortunately contribute to citizens' poverty, indirectly cause an endless circle? The existing literatures mostly focus on western countries, and very few studies put attention to the difference that caused by gender, therefore, we turned our eyes on an Asian country, China, that we've already known that China had surpassed become the most obese people in the world in recent years, for further study.

More than 50% adults in China had classified overweight, in particular, 16.4% are obese, in 2020 [4]. Based on the past studies, there are a lot of stereotypes happened on overweight and obese people, generally, less active, less productive, less successful, etc, which result in less recommendations for hiring than others [5]. Here comes to our concern, in such a huge statistical data record, will these people encounter more hiring discriminations than others even though there would not be face-to-face interviews for hiring managers to directly interact with them? We believe that overweight/obese people will experience more or less discriminations due to hiring managers' automatically stereotypes; secondly, we also deem that women in the same weight situation would experience more discriminations than men do. Based on our hypothesis, we have designed a field study and evaluated the result based on the callback rates. IAT(Implicit Associations Test) is being used in our study in order to predict hiring managers' reacting behaviours.

2. STUDY DESIGN

We created 18 resumes in total, 9 for each gender (n=18). Basically, the resumes included all the applicants' names, email addresses, phone numbers, objectives, skills, education backgrounds, etc (Fig 1 for example). Very importantly, the profiles, which were used in order to show hiring managers the different types of weight (normal/overweight and obesity) among

applicants. Lots of occupations such as receptionist and waitress, are naturally having requirements on workers' appearances, which were been excluded in our first decision. Sales assistant and accountant's occupations were being chosen for our subjects, since hiring managers in these two positions will mostly focused on people's professional knowledge rather than pay attention to more attractive appearance.



Fig 1 Applicants Resume

The made-up applicants had very similar information in every resumes, such as academic qualification, relevant work experience, and being educated in almost the same type of universities (ranked similarly). We controlled the variables to ensure that the info was mostly the same, hence minimising possible bias happening.

Six companies would be randomly chosen for our study, participants from companies (hiring managers) would receive the resumes. Afterwards, we chose six photos from internet that were created (three women, three men), then photoshopped them into three types: normal weight, overweight and obesity.

Set normal weight as 1, overweight as 2 and obese as 3. There are woman A, B and C, man D, E and F (Fig 2 Study Design). Randomly combined them, for example, combined A1, B2 and C3 as a group (for women), which included all types of weight that we are going to test about; then using the same principle, combined D1, E2 and F3 (for men). Distributed both gender into 3 groups (3 different types of weight for each gender as a group), then sent out resumes in group to companies twice, once for sales assistant occupation, and once for accountant. (3 companies are looking for sales assistant, 3 for accountant).

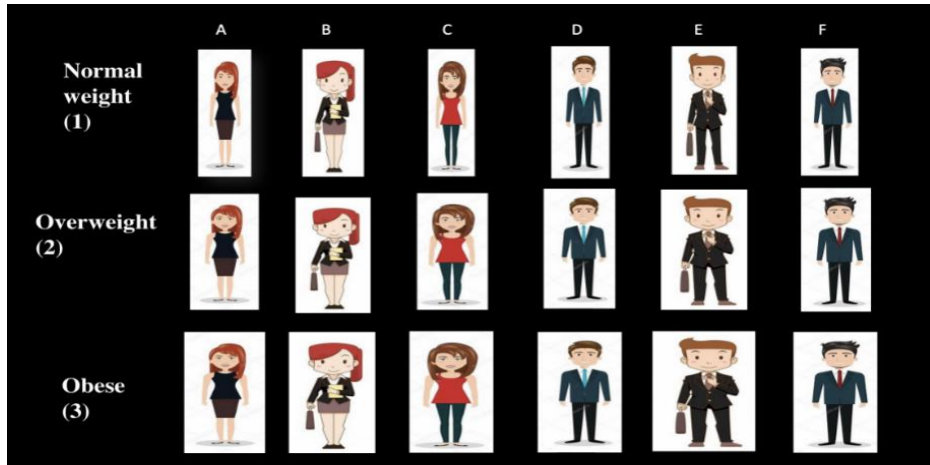


Fig 2 Study Design

2.1. Measure

Discriminatory behaviour would be measured by callback rates and the result of IAT test (we will sent to the hiring managers). Questionnaires were sent to participants for IAT testing, for instance, how do you think about obesity, do you have any family member is overweight, how do you think about gender equality, and so on, asking some specific questions to indicate gender/obesity discriminations.

We believe that IAT test will match our expected result, hiring manager who gets lower score on IAT test, will have high probability show more discrimination during the study, which means he/she would hire more people with normal weight. Furthermore, IAT test could tell us implicit bias that may not be classified by only doing the field study, we will understand more clearly whether the hiring managers holding gender discriminations or not.

After the experiment, we would inform hiring managers the purpose of the study, in case they really opposed and was unwittingly forced to participate in the experiment, they will be rewarded because of their contributions to the study. The result will be analysed, and then discussed about whether obesity/gender

discrimination do exist because of people’s stereotypes or not, and there are actually any disadvantages impacted on them.

2.2. Result

According to former studies on gender discriminations and the ratio of getting hired, in Chinese

market, gender gap had risen from 9.4% in 1990 to 14.1% in 2020 [6]. We could find out that gender gap (Fig 3 gender gap) is decreasing gradually in other countries [7], whereas the condition in China is getting more and more serious: before getting employed, women are easily being considered they need to contribute their time in taking care of family and children. Even if women have the same capacity as men do, they still get lower chance to be hired. We reasonably predicted the probability that normal weight males could be hired is 43%, nearly 1/2 chance. However, even though females are fighting for their rights actively, situation is still very serious, 27%, the probability is half lower than men own. Overweight/obesity people, no matter females or males, their opportunities are much less than normal-weight individuals, and obese females who have chance to get an interview, is only 9%.

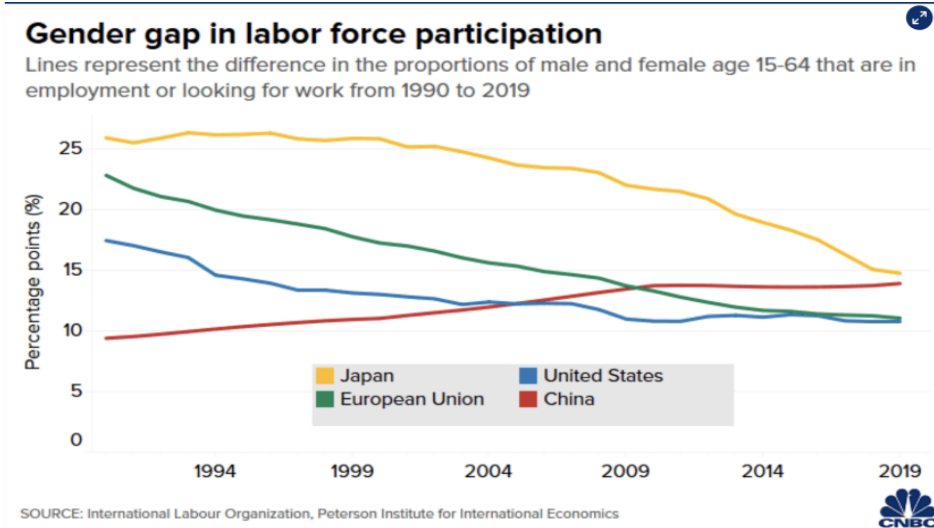


Fig 3 Gender Gap

As the result shows us (Fig 4 the expected result), people in normal weight have much more chance

to be employed, what's more, fat males get similar chance to be hired as normal weight females do. When people in different gender are in the same weight, males always have more opportunity to be hired than women do. According to what we saw in the gender gap (Fig 3 gender gap), this condition will be even more severe in China's job market, which may cause many problems happening in the society. For example, even though females have occupied 50% of the world's population, the rate of wealth owning for them is only 1%. Also, in some places, women are still hardly to earn money, or to inherit property due to lack of rights [8].

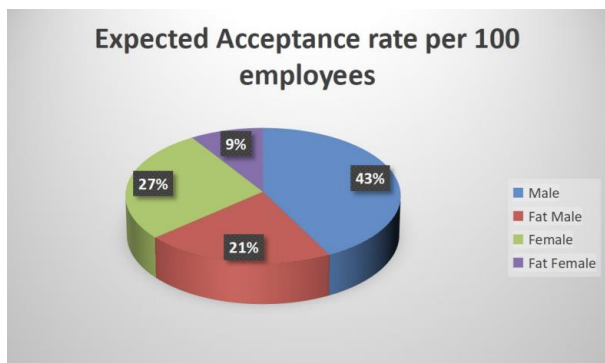


Fig 4 Expected Result

3. CONCLUSION

People always see obese people as those with less capacity in finishing daily tasks. Such discrimination would result in less salaries for these populations at start, and they might be regarded as groups with low competence. With low socioeconomic status, coworkers always treat them contemptuously since they are being questioned about leadership potential. The result is obvious, and is also being proved in our study: they will hardly get chance to demonstrate their abilities since

most of them even could not get an interview, not to mention gaining the jobs with their talents.

Social trend could cause discriminations occurring: for a surprisingly funding, weight discrimination is even more serious than racial discrimination. For instance, in an experiment (n=2,290) [9], almost 60% participants had reported hiring discriminations occurred at least once, 3% of overweight, 6% of obese and 28% of very obese. Again (in this data also), women had experienced much more discriminations than men had. The percentage respectively were 10%, 20% and 45%; almost exceed half of the participants.

Overweight/obese people unfortunately get paid less than those with normal weight, by doing a statistical analysis, 93% of hiring managers are more willing to hire someone that is in normal weight, rather than hiring people who are visibly obese. Sadly, the market is even more hostile to females. Heavy women generally earned 9,000 dollars less on average, more heavier a woman is, she will get less and less paid in total [10].

Discrimination against obese women more than against obese men leads to more potential discrimination. Nevertheless, some researches have shown another discrimination direction, that is, underweight. Surprisingly, higher probability for men to be unemployed if they are underweight, which is a very different condition compare to overweight. Some overweight/obese people may choose to control their diet in an unhealthy approach, and eventually develop eating disorder, making the condition even worse than before. For example, anorexia nervosa and avoidant-restrictive food intake disorder, which are relevant to underweight possibility. In another case, bulimia disorder and binge-eating disorder will make people being more obese, and bringing about healthy problems in the end [11].

In European countries and America, they got laws about anti-discrimination to restrain excessive

discriminations happening. For example, under the EPA (Equal Pay Act) in 1963, companies were prohibited to pay women less than man at work, some laws also restrained discriminations about sex orientation and tattoos, and so on [12]. However, in China, even though we do have laws talked about gender discrimination, but we do not have a very accurate regulations to standard obesity discrimination. That's something for the future plan.

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