Immigrant Skills Discounting: When Religious Affiliation Leads to Discrimination
Caroline Bennett-AbuAyyash & Victoria M. Esses, The University of Western Ontario

INTRODUCTION

• Success of Canada’s immigration policies has been challenged by *immigrant skills discounting*, defined by Reitz (2002) as the devaluation of immigrants’ foreign education and experience relative to those of locally-trained employees

• Previous research suggests that prejudice toward minority groups is a contributing factor (Esses & Dietz, 2002)

• Given the documented rise in anti-Muslim attitudes, this study examines skills discounting as a function of religious affiliation (Muslim or Christian)

Proposed Model for the Effect of Religious Affiliation on the Evaluation of Foreign Trained Job Applicants (Based on the Justification-Suppression Model of Prejudice; Crandall & Eshleman, 2003)

Hypothesis

There will be an interaction between the religious affiliation of the applicant and his location of training, such that when the applicant belongs to a religious minority group and possesses foreign training (as an immigrant), he will receive the least favorable evaluations

METHOD

Participants

143 Canadian university students

Design

2 (location of training) x 3 (religious affiliation) factorial design

• Location of training: Canada or Cyprus

• Religious affiliation: Christian, Muslim, or No Affiliation

Procedure

1. Participants reviewed a job advertisement and resume for an applicant for a kinesiologist position:

2. Participants then watched a taped interview of the applicant: *Pendant indicative of religious affiliation*

Dependent Measures

Evaluation of Soft Skills:

e.g., “If hired, the applicant is likely to conform to organizational norms”

Evaluation of Hard Skills:

e.g., “Overall, the applicant’s education (OR experience) is suitable for the kinesiologist position”

RESULTS

Soft Skills: Significant interaction $F(2,133) = 4.50, p < .05$.

• Out-group derogation: Muslim Immigrant received lower ratings than the Christian Immigrant and the Canadian trained applicants

Hard Skills: Significant interaction $F(2, 134) = 3.58, p < .05$

• In-group favoritism: Christian Immigrant was rated more positively than his Muslim and No Affiliation counterparts, as well as the Canadian trained applicants

DISCUSSION & IMPLICATIONS

• When presented as Canadian-trained, religious affiliation had no bearing on the evaluation of the applicant’s soft and hard skills

• When presented as Foreign-trained, the Christian applicant was at a consistent advantage while the Muslim applicant was at a consistent disadvantage

• Evidence of discrimination toward the Foreign-trained Muslim, with variation in pattern depending on whether examining perceptions of hard or soft skills: mainly in-group favoritism toward the Christian applicant on hard skills and out-group derogation of Muslim applicant on soft skills

• Implications:

  → Are the benefits of credential recognition limited to in-group members?

  → Additional tools needed to address perceived lack of soft skills

  → Need to engage in further research on the distinction between hard and soft skills, as well as means to incorporate both when addressing immigrant skills discounting

*Contact Information: Caroline Bennett-AbuAyyash: cabuayya@uwo.ca*