

Summary

With the increased flows of migration within and into Europe in recent decades, and with immigration and related topics more recently taking centre stage in political and public discourse in many European societies, there has been a substantial and growing academic interest in ethnic discrimination as a potential obstacle to entry into the labour market. A multitude of experimental studies have demonstrated the prevalence of discriminatory behaviour in a wide range of national and occupational contexts for many minority groups. However, some challenges remain understudied. Comparative experimental research is scarce, and going beyond measuring the extent of discrimination into unpacking its contextual determinants presents an additional hurdle. This thesis consists of four papers: two examine aspects of ethnic discrimination using data from a harmonised, cross-national correspondence study, a third examines labour market outcomes more generally using high-quality population registries from Norway and the fourth discusses the experimental design and measurements of labour market discrimination from a methodological perspective.

The first paper compares discrimination of a particular minority group in two substantially different national labour market contexts: Pakistani migrants and their descendants in the UK and Norway, respectively. By thoroughly comparing the employment protection legislation, migration history and anti-discrimination legislation in the two contexts, we form the expectation that the same group would face more severe discrimination in the Norwegian context. Contrary to these expectations, we find a surprising similarity in the relative penalties associated with signalling a Pakistani background through names; however, the additional penalty associated with information indicating Islamic association appears to be substantially stronger in the Norwegian context. We then discuss potential explanations for these differences.

The second paper uses the literature on intersectionality and occupational sex typing as a starting point. We analyse the gendered aspect of ethnic labour market discrimination by analysing comparative data from the cross-national, harmonised field experiment. We compare ethnic discrimination of male and female applicants in a variety of occupational settings and find that while female candidates seem to be preferred in general, male and female minority applicants face similar levels of ethnic discrimination. More closely investigating the differences across occupations reveals interesting heterogeneity; in particular, female candidates experience stronger ethnic penalties in female-dominated occupations. This leads us to theorise that employers operate based on stereotypes of ideal workers along the dimensions of both gender and minority status: if an applicant does not confirm to the stereotype on either dimension, he or she receives a similar discriminatory penalty.

The third paper examines a particular outcome that we assume to be a potential product of ethnic discrimination: relative overqualification. Taking the Norwegian context as a case and using population registry data, we thoroughly analyse patterns of overqualification of immigrant groups and their descendants compared to the reference majority. We find that while immigrants are generally at a higher risk of being overqualified for their jobs, the same does not apply to their descendants. Descendants of migrants in general are no more at risk of being overqualified than their majority counterparts. In light of our findings from the correspondence study that descendants experience substantial levels of discrimination in the early stages of the hiring process, this is somewhat surprising. Additionally, the paper contains a methodological innovation and discussion on how occupational definition is important for measuring relative overqualification. We find that the differences in relative overqualification between immigrants and the majority are robust even when comparing individuals holding the same jobs in the same sectors, firms and municipalities.

The fourth paper addresses an important design feature of correspondence studies, the differences between matched and unmatched designs. By way of theoretical simulation experiments, I argue for a particular danger regarding matched designs: the potential effects of induced competition when applicant pools are small. Matched designs are plausibly sensitive to the average number of *other* applicants who apply to jobs—a number usually unknown to the researcher—in a way unmatched designs are not. This has important implications for the comparability of results from matched designs, as the design itself can either exaggerate or obscure real differences in the levels of discrimination.