



Vaasan yliopisto
UNIVERSITY OF VAASA

Anniina Myller

Anonymous Recruitment as a tool to reduce Hiring Discrimination

University of Vaasa
Bachelor's thesis
Program of International
Business

Vaasa 2026

UNIVERSITY OF VAASA**School of management****Author:** Anniina Myller**Title of the thesis:** The Impact of Anonymous Recruitment Hiring Discrimination**Degree:** Bachelor of science in International Business**Degree Programme:** International Business**Supervisor:** Zixin He**Year:** 2026**Pages:** 32

ABSTRACT:

Although organizations increasingly emphasize equal treatment in recruitment, differences in hiring outcomes continue to be reported across many labour markets. Previous studies have shown that characteristics unrelated to job performance, such as ethnicity, gender, age, or applicants' names, may affect how candidates are evaluated during recruitment.

This thesis explores the role of anonymous recruitment as a potential way to reduce such unequal treatment. The study focuses especially on the early stages of hiring, where employers review applications and decide which candidates move forward. The thesis also uses signalling theory to explain how employers interpret different signals in job applications and how personal information may influence decisions.

Evidence from previous studies indicate that anonymous recruitment can reduce discrimination during the first screening stage by shifting attention more toward qualifications, skills, and work experience. In some cases, anonymization has improved equal access to interview opportunities for minority applicants. However, the findings also show some limitations. Once candidates move to interviews, identity becomes visible again, and bias may still influence decisions.

Anonymous recruitment can support fairer hiring practices, but it is not a complete solution to discrimination. Its impact is shaped by organizational practices and the broader recruitment context. For this reason, anonymization is best understood as one element of a wider effort to promote fair and objective hiring decisions.

KEYWORDS: Anonymous recruitment, Hiring discrimination, Implicit bias, fairness, recruitment, signaling theory

Contents

1	Introduction	5
1.1	Background of the study and Research questions	6
1.2	Research questions and objectives	7
1.3	Defenition of key terms	8
1.4	Structure of the thesis	9
2	Hiring Discrimination in Recruitment	11
2.1	Evidence of Discrimination in recruitment	12
2.2	Signalling theory framework	13
2.3	Forms of discrimination in recruitment	14
2.3.1	Ethnic discrimination	14
2.3.2	Gender discrimination	15
2.3.3	Age discrimination	15
2.4	Mechanism of discrimination	16
2.4.1	Implicit bias	16
2.4.2	Taste-based discrimination	17
2.4.3	Statistical discrimination	17
3	Anonymous Recruitment	18
3.1	Defenition	18
3.2	Implementation	19
3.3	Potential advantages of anonymous recruitment	20
3.4	Limiatations of anonymous recruitment	21
4	Evaluation of anonymous recruitment in reducing discrimination	22
4.1	Anonymous recruitment and different forms of hiring discrimination	22
4.2	Effect of anonymous recruitment on fairness	24
4.3	What limits the effectiveness of anonymous recruitment	25
5	Conclusions	27

AI usage report	29
References	30

1 Introduction

Hiring decisions play an important role in organizational performance, productivity and workforce diversity. Because employees are a key resource for organizations, recruitment has become an important topic in business and management research (Adamovic, 2022). Recruitment can be understood as the practices and activities organizations use to identify and attract potential employees for open positions. Effective recruitment helps organizations find qualified employees and ensures that they have the skills needed to perform successfully. The recruitment process is important because it allows organizations to attract individuals who can contribute to their success. (Barber, 1998).

Organizations aim to select candidates who possess the skills, knowledge and experience required for the specific position. Recruitment processes are also expected to ensure that applicants are evaluated fairly and objectively (Wolgast et al., 2017). Many organizations now rely on digital recruitment platforms, structured hiring procedures and standardized evaluation methods in order to manage the hiring process more efficiently and transparently (Whitney, 2014). These developments aim to support more objective hiring decisions and reduce the role of subjective judgments when evaluating candidates.

Despite these developments recruitment processes still involve several challenges. Recruiters often need to review a large number of applications within a limited time. When decisions have to be made quickly, evaluations may rely on simplified judgments rather than careful comparison of candidates. Recruitment processes may unintentionally reproduce inequalities in the labour market if applicants are not assessed solely based on job-related qualifications (Adamovic, 2022). This thesis explores whether anonymous recruitment can help reduce such bias in hiring decisions.

1.1 Background of the study and Research questions

Recruitment processes are not always fully objective and discrimination still affects certain groups in the labour market, especially applicants with international or minority backgrounds (Adamovic, 2022). Studies have found that employer decisions may be influenced not only by applicants' qualifications but also by signals related to their personal background and as a result equally qualified candidates may still be treated differently (Lippens et al., 2023). Recruiters may rely on quick judgments when reviewing applications, and unconscious stereotypes may influence decisions without employers realizing it (Greenwald & Krieger, 2006).

One way to reduce this type of bias is anonymous recruitment. In anonymous recruitment processes identifying information such as names or gender is removed from job applications before they are evaluated. This allows candidates to be assessed primarily on the basis of their qualifications and their skills (Krause et al., 2012).

Studies show that applicants with identical qualifications may still receive different responses from employers depending on their background (Vermeiren, 2021). For example, Bertrand and Mullainathan (2004) found that applicants with White-sounding names got more interview invitations than applicants with African American-sounding names, even when the applications were otherwise identical. Similar patterns have been observed in several countries. According to Zschirnt & Ruedin (2016) ethnic minority applicants receive fewer interview invitations than majority applicants even when qualifications are the same. These differences appear already in the early stages of recruitment process when employers review applications and decide which candidates are invited to interviews. Fair recruitment practices are not only relevant from the perspective of equality but they also help organizations to reach a wider selection of potential talent (Adamovic, 2022).

1.2 Research questions and objectives

The aim of this thesis is to examine whether anonymous recruitment can reduce hiring discrimination and improve fairness in recruitment processes that all candidates would have equal opportunities. The study focuses on how discrimination may occur during recruitment processes and how making recruitment processes anonymous can influence employer decision-making and can it make recruitment more fair and equal towards candidates.

This thesis aims to examine discrimination in recruitment and explore whether anonymous recruitment can reduce bias in hiring decisions. It explains different ways people may experience discrimination during the hiring process and examines factors that can affect employers' decisions, such as unconscious bias and personal details in applications that reveal someone's identity. The study discusses empirical research and policy experiments related to anonymous recruitment.

Based on this objective, the thesis addresses the following research questions:

- 1) What forms of discrimination in recruitment have been identified?
- 2) What is anonymous recruitment and how can it affect discrimination in hiring processes?
- 3) How can anonymous recruitment influence fairness in recruitment processes, and what limitations may affect its effectiveness?

The goal is to understand both the mechanisms behind discrimination and whether anonymous recruitment can make hiring more fair. By bringing together findings from different studies, the thesis aims to build a clearer picture of the effects of anonymous recruitment.

1.3 Defenition of key terms

Hiring discrimination refers to situations where job applicants are treated differently because of characteristics that are not related to their ability to perform in the job (Adamovic, 2022). These characteristics may include ethnicity, gender, age or other aspects of a person's identity (Vermeiren, 2021). Due to this applicants with similar qualifications may still be evaluated differently during the hiring process.

Discrimination appears especially at the earliest stage of recruitment. This stage includes reviewing job applications and deciding which candidates are invited to interviews (Vermeiren, 2021). Decisions made at this stage can have a strong impact on the later stages of recruitment.

Anonymous recruitment has been suggested as one possible way to reduce discrimination in hiring. In this type of recruitment process identifying information is removed from job applications before they are evaluated (Rinne, 2018). This often includes removing details such as names, gender, photographs or nationality from application documents (Krause et al., 2012). The idea is that recruiters focus mainly on applicants skills, qualifications and work experience instead of personal identity (Rinne, 2018).

Another concept related to recruitment discrimination is implicit bias. Implicit bias refers to unconscious attitudes or stereotypes that influence how people interpret information and make decisions (Greenwald & Krieger, 2006). Because these biases operate automatically, individuals may not always be aware that they influence their judgments. In recruitment situations such biases may affect how recruiters interpret applicants' qualifications or assess their suitability for a position (Adamovic, 2022).

Name bias is a related phenomenon. It occurs when a person's name signals aspects of their social identity such as ethnic or cultural background (Morin, 2024). Certain names may trigger stereotypes in the minds of employers. As a result applicants with

minority-sounding names may receive fewer interview invitations than candidates with majority-group names even when their qualifications are identical (Vermeiren, 2021).

1.4 Structure of the thesis

This thesis is divided into five main chapters. The first chapter introduces the topic and explains why recruitment discrimination and anonymous recruitment are important issues to study. It also presents the research questions and objectives of the thesis. In addition, key concepts are defined to make the topic and perspective of the study clearer.

The second chapter focuses on hiring discrimination in recruitment. It looks at evidence of discrimination and discusses different forms of unequal treatment, such as ethnic, gender, and age discrimination. The chapter also explains why discrimination may happen in recruitment processes, theories and mechanisms such as signalling theory, implicit bias and statistical discrimination are used to study this.

Chapter 3 explains what anonymous recruitment means in practice and how organizations have previously used it in different recruitment processes. The chapter also looks at both the advantages and the limitations of anonymous recruitment and discusses how it connects to previous research on hiring discrimination.

The 4th chapter examines how effective anonymous recruitment is by studying whether anonymization can reduce discrimination and improve fairness in recruitment. The chapter also reviews findings from earlier studies and recruitment experiments, and aims to identify factors where anonymous recruitment may work better and situations where its effects may remain limited.

The final chapter brings together the main findings of the thesis. It presents the conclusions of the study, reflects on the limitations of the research, and discusses

possible ideas for future research related to fair recruitment and anonymous hiring practices.

2 Hiring Discrimination in Recruitment

Hiring discrimination is the practice of treating job candidates differently due to traits unrelated to their skills or suitability for the position (Adamovic, 2022). These traits can be things like race, gender, age, religion, or other parts of a person's qualities that can not be changed. Hiring decisions should be based on objective factors like abilities, education, and job history. Still sometimes candidate's identity can affect how employers see and judge them (Whitney, 2014).

Wider reviews show that these trends are not just one-time events. Meta-analyses of correspondence experiments show that minority applicants often have a lower chance of receiving interview invitations than majority applicants with similar qualifications (Zschirnt & Ruedin, 2016). These findings suggest that discrimination can occur even when employers believe they are evaluating candidates objectively.

Legal frameworks are a key tool for reducing discrimination in recruitment. They establish rules that promote fairness and protect applicants during the hiring process. It also highlight the fact why organisations need to act fairly when making hiring decisions. In the European Union, several directives address equality in employment. One example is the Racial Equality Directive (2000/43/EC). This directive bans discrimination based on racial or ethnic origin. Another key regulation is the Employment Equality Directive (2000/78/EC). It prohibits unequal treatment related to religion, disability, age, or sexual orientation in the workplace. An important part of these laws is how they are enforced. When there is reason to suspect discrimination, employers may be required to show that their decision was fair and based on valid decision (European Commission, 2026).

Understanding discrimination in recruitment is important not only from a social and legal perspective, but also for organisations that want to identify and hire the most qualified candidates. Discrimination in the hiring process can prevent employers from recognising talent and making the best hiring decisions.

The next sections examine evidence of discrimination in recruitment and explore the different forms and mechanisms in how it can occur.

2.1 Evidence of Discrimination in recruitment

Researches shows that discrimination occurs in recruitment processes across many labour markets. Correspondence experiments are often used to study discrimination in hiring because researchers can change only things like a person's name or background while keeping the applicants' qualifications the same (Vermeiren, 2021). This helps show whether employers react differently to applicants when deciding who to invite for an interview.

A review of correspondence studies conducted across several OECD countries found that minority applicants often need to send significantly more applications than majority applicants in order to receive the same number of interview invitations (Zschirnt & Ruedin, 2016). Studies from different countries show a similar pattern: applicants from ethnic minority groups are less likely to get a positive response from employers, even when they have the same qualifications as majority applicants. Lippens et al. (2023) found that minority applicants received about 15.8% fewer positive responses during the hiring process. Their research also showed that discrimination is not limited to ethnicity. Older applicants, applicants with disabilities, and less physically attractive applicants also received fewer opportunities in recruitment.

A study by Bertrand and Mullainathan (2004) found that employers reacted differently to job applications based only on the applicant's name. Applications with White-sounding names received about 50% more callbacks than identical applications with African-American-sounding names.

Discrimination often appears at the very beginning of the recruitment process. Recruiters may need to go through dozens or even hundreds of applications in a short

time. Recruiters do not always have time to carefully examine every applicant and may instead rely on quick impressions or stereotypes (Whitney, 2014). Small details such as a person's name, background, or work history can then affect how that person is judged.

Bias in recruitment is not always intentional. Employers may rely on unconscious assumptions without even noticing it themselves (Greenwald & Krieger, 2006). Most correspondence experiments focus only on the first stage of recruitment, when employers decide which applicants are invited to interviews. So the studies cannot fully explain what happens later in the hiring process or how discrimination may continue during interviews and final hiring decisions. Still, the results across many studies show that discrimination during the recruitment remains a common problem in labour markets.

2.2 Signalling theory framework

Signalling theory helps explain how employers read job applications. They cannot directly see how skilled someone will be before hiring them. Recruiters look for signals in the application that might give some idea about the candidate (Spence, 1973). In Spence's theory, education is one of the main signals in the labour market. A degree or qualification may suggest that a person has certain skills or abilities. Diploma does not exactly show how someone will perform at work. Still, employers often use it when comparing applicants (Spence, 1973).

Job applications contain many different signals. Some are clearly related to qualifications, such as education, work experience, or specific skills. Others are more indirect. Even something as simple as a name can reveal information about a person's background. Several studies point that these kinds of signals can influence employer reactions. Minority applicants often receive fewer interview invitations even when their qualifications are the same (Zschirnt & Ruedin, 2016).

From a signalling perspective, employers are not only evaluating skills. They are also interpreting the signals they see in the application. Anonymous recruitment tries to change this situation. When identifying details are removed from applications, signals like names or age become less visible. In that case, recruiters may pay more attention to qualifications, skills, and work experience instead (Krause et al., 2012).

2.3 Forms of discrimination in recruitment

Research identifies several forms of discrimination that may influence recruitment decisions. These forms can overlap, as applicants belong to multiple social groups that shape how they are perceived by employers (Derous & Pepermans, 2019)

2.3.1 Ethnic discrimination

Ethnic discrimination is one of the most consistently documented forms of hiring discrimination. Evidence from correspondence experiments also finds that ethnic minority applicants consistently receive fewer positive responses from employers across different labour markets (Lippens et al., 2023). According to Zschirnt & Ruedin (2016), minority applicants often need to submit significantly more applications in order to obtain the same number of interview invitations as majority candidates. The results show that some ethnic minority groups face more difficulties in hiring than others.

Discrimination does not appear equally in every job or organization. A study show that discrimination is more likely in jobs involving customer interaction or in occupations where stereotypes about competence may be influential (Adamovic, 2022).

2.3.2 Gender discrimination

Gender discrimination has also been widely examined in recruitment research. The results are not as consistent as those found for ethnic discrimination. Some studies show that women are disadvantaged in hiring decisions (Derous & Pepermans, 2019). Other research does not find clear differences between male and female applicants. In certain occupations, women may even have a slight advantage depending on the context of the job (Derous & Pepermans, 2019).

More recent studies have started to focus on intersectionality. Discrimination often occurs through the interaction of several identities rather than through gender alone. For example, ethnic minority women may face stronger barriers in recruitment than both minority men and majority women (Derous & Pepermans, 2019). In other words, belonging to two disadvantaged groups may increase the likelihood of hiring discrimination.

Researchers have also looked at whether removing identity signals can influence evaluation outcomes. Evidence from other selection settings gives useful insight. A study of orchestral auditions found that female musicians were more likely to move forward in the selection process when the evaluators could not see them (Goldin & Rouse, 2000). During these auditions, musicians performed behind a screen so the judges could not identify their gender. The results suggest that when identity cues are hidden, decisions may become more objective.

2.3.3 Age discrimination

Age discrimination is another form of inequality in recruitment. Stereotypes related to age can influence hiring decisions for both older and younger applicants. Older applicants are sometimes perceived as less adaptable, less capable of learning new technologies or lower productivity (Anand et al., 2024).

Employers may interpret signals such as graduation dates or length of work experience as indicators of age (Anad et al.,2024). These cues can trigger assumptions about applicants' productivity or flexibility, even when these biases are not supported by actual evidence.

2.4 Mechanism of discrimination

Discrimination in recruitment can be explained through several different mechanisms. In some cases, hiring decisions are influenced by unconscious stereotypes and biases, while in others employers may rely on assumptions or expectations about different social groups when evaluating applicants. The following sections discuss three identified mechanisms of discrimination in recruitment: implicit bias, taste-based discrimination, and statistical discrimination.

2.4.1 Implicit bias

Implicit bias refers to unconscious attitudes or stereotypes that influence judgments and behaviour without conscious awareness (Greenwald & Krieger, 2006). Psychological research highlight that people can hold automatic associations about social groups even when they consciously reject prejudice.

In recruitment settings, implicit bias may affect how employers interpret job applications and evaluate candidates because employers often review resumes quickly, they may make decisions based on quick impressions instead of looking carefully at each application (Whitney, 2014). For this reason, names or background details may affect how candidates are judged.

2.4.2 Taste-based discrimination

According to Becker's theory reviewed by Collard (1972) employers may sometimes prefer not to hire certain groups because of personal prejudices rather than applicants's qualifications and abilities (Collard, 1972). As a result, applicants may be treated differently even when they are equally qualified for a position.

Hiring decisions may also be influenced by how employers expect others to react. For example, employers may consider how coworkers or customers would respond to working with a particular employee (Van Borm et al., 2020). In cases of taste-based discrimination, hiring decisions are shaped by anticipated reactions from others rather than by applicants' qualifications.

2.4.3 Statistical discrimination

Statistical discrimination is based on assumptions about social groups rather than individual applicants. Employers may rely on group characteristics when forming expectations about their abilities when they have limited information (Zschirnt & Ruedin, 2016).

Instead of evaluating each candidate individually, applicant may be evaluated based on stereotypes about the average characteristics of social groups. These assumptions can influence how employers interpret job applications (Adamovic, 2022).

3 Anonymous Recruitment

This chapter focuses on anonymous recruitment and its role in reducing discrimination in hiring processes. The chapter explains what anonymous recruitment means, how it is used in practice, and its possible limitations and advantages.

3.1 Definition

Anonymous recruitment refers to recruitment procedures where identifying information about applicants is removed from job applications (Rinne, 2018). In practice, this usually means removing information such as names, gender, photographs, nationality, or addresses from application documents (Krause et al., 2012). The main purpose is to reduce the influence of identity-related signals during the early stages of hiring.

This approach is closely linked to research on hiring discrimination. Studies show that signals such as names or background information may influence how recruiters view qualifications during resume screening (Vermeiren, 2021). Research on implicit bias also suggests that people may rely on stereotypes when making quick decisions about candidates (Greenwald & Krieger, 2006). Because recruiters often review many applications within limited time, such biases can influence hiring decisions even when decision-makers believe they are evaluating candidates objectively (Whitney, 2014).

From a signalling theory perspective, anonymized recruitment reduces the visibility of identity signals in job applications. (Spence, 1973). By removing information such as names, gender, or age, the recruitment process limits signals that may trigger biased interpretations by employers. Anonymous recruitment attempts to address this problem by removing identity-related details that may activate stereotypes. When personal information is hidden, recruiters are pushed to focus more on skills, qualifications, and work experience (Rinne, 2018).

3.2 Implementation

Several countries and organizations have experimented with anonymous recruitment as a way to reduce discrimination in hiring. Policy experiments in Europe have tested anonymized job applications in both public and private sector recruitment processes (Krause et al., 2012). These initiatives aim to examine if removing identity information can reduce unequal treatment during resume screening.

In many implementations personal information is removed from applications before recruiters review them. This can be done through standardized application forms or digital recruitment systems that automatically hide identifying information (Rinne, 2018). Similar approaches have been used in policy experiments across European countries that tested anonymized job applications in recruitment processes (Krause et al., 2012).

Experiments conducted in several European countries provide evidence about how anonymization works in practice. For example, trials in Germany, Sweden, and the Netherlands have tested anonymous recruitment in public sector hiring (Krause et al., 2012). Similar pilot projects have also been introduced in Finland in order to examine whether anonymization can improve equal access to interview opportunities for applicants from minority backgrounds (Kanninen & Kiviholma, 2024)

Although these experiments differ in their design, they share a common objective that removing identity-related information is expected to reduce the influence of stereotypes and bias during the initial screening stage of recruitment.

3.3 Potential advantages of anonymous recruitment

Signalling theory explains how recruiters read job applications. They look for signals to understand who the candidate is (Spence, 1973). Some of these signals are useful, like education, skills, and work experience because they can tell something about how a person might perform at work. Things like a person's name or background can also send signals. These can easily lead to assumptions that are not related to actual ability (Bertrand & Mullainathan, 2004). In anonymous recruitment process those identity details are removed, so recruiters have fewer chances to rely on stereotypes. Anonymization can help make decisions more objective (Krause et al., 2012).

In a Finnish field experiment, anonymizing applications increased the hiring of applicants with foreign-sounding names and removed the previous hiring gap between groups (Kanninen & Kiviholma, 2024). In other words removing identity information may create more equal opportunities during screening. In recruitment research, anonymized applications have also been associated with better opportunities for minority candidates in some cases. Removing identity-related information can increase the likelihood that applicants from minority backgrounds receive interview invitations (Krause et al., 2012). These findings support the idea that anonymization may reduce discrimination at the screening stage of recruitment.

Evidence from other selection settings also supports this view. A study on orchestral auditions showed that blind auditions increased the chances that female musicians moved forward in the selection process (Goldin & Rouse, 2000). When the identity of the performers was hidden, evaluators had to focus only on musical performance instead of gender.

3.4 Limitations of anonymous recruitment

First, anonymization only works at the beginning of the process. Once candidates are invited to interviews, their identity becomes visible. At that point, bias can still influence decisions (Rinne, 2018). Bias may not disappear but discrimination may continue once employers meet the candidates face to face, because then the signals are visible again.

Findings from field experiments demonstrate that discrimination in hiring is influenced by many contextual factors. Recruitment decisions can be shaped by organizational practices, job characteristics, and labour market conditions (Adamovic, 2022). Anonymization alone cannot fully remove discrimination from hiring processes.

Identity also cannot always be fully hidden. Recruiters may still guess information about a candidate based on things like education, work history, or language skills (Morin, 2024). In addition recruiters may depend on contextual cues when assessing candidates under time pressure (Adamovic, 2022).

Some scholars also argue that anonymization may create difficulties for diversity policies. Organizations that want to improve the representation of minority groups may find it harder to identify candidates from underrepresented backgrounds when personal information is removed (Krause et al., 2012). This shows that the relationship between anonymization and diversity goals is not always simple.

Anonymous recruitment mostly affects the first screening stage. Later in the recruitment process, personal information becomes visible again, and bias may still influence hiring decisions (Rinne, 2018).

4 Evaluation of anonymous recruitment in reducing discrimination

Anonymous recruitment should be understood as one potential tool for reducing discrimination rather than a complete solution. Studies on hiring discrimination consistently show that identity signals can influence recruitment decisions (Bertrand & Mullainathan, 2004). Because these signals often appear directly in job applications, anonymization specifically targets the stage where discrimination frequently occurs.

Discrimination is shaped by psychological, organizational, and structural factors (Adamovic, 2022). For this reason, many scholars argue that anonymous recruitment should be combined with other measures aimed at promoting fair hiring practices. These examples include structured interviews and standardized evaluation criteria. Applicants are more likely to see recruitment processes more fair when procedures are consistent and transparent (Gilliland, 1993). Structured recruitment practices may also help reduce bias in decision-making (Adamovic, 2022). For example, using the same interview questions for all candidates and applying consistent evaluation criteria may reduce subjective judgments and improve fairness in recruitment (Wolgast et al., 2017). Combined with anonymization, these practices may support fairer recruitment processes.

4.1 Anonymous recruitment and different forms of hiring discrimination

Signalling theory helps explain why anonymous recruitment may reduce discrimination. Employers often rely on different signals when reviewing applications, and some of these signals are linked to identity rather than actual ability (Spence, 1973).

For example, a study by Bertrand and Mullainathan (2004) found that applicants with White-sounding names received about 50% more callbacks than those with African-American-sounding names, even when the applications were otherwise identical. Qualifications alone do not always explain hiring decisions. Removing personal details may limit biased judgments. In particular, it makes it harder for recruiters to rely on general assumptions about groups, which is known as statistical discrimination (Zschirnt & Ruedin, 2016). It may also reduce the effect of unconscious bias, since there are fewer signals that trigger automatic judgments (Greenwald & Krieger, 2006).

In the case of gender discrimination, removing names can reduce bias. These effects have been observed in blind orchestra auditions, where hiding the identity of candidates increased women's chances of advancing (Goldin & Rouse, 2000). When gender is not visible, recruiters cannot rely on stereotypes related to gender roles or competence. Gender can be hard to fully hidden, recruiters may infer gender from indirect signals such as career breaks or work experience patterns (Foley & Williamson, 2018).

Anonymous recruitment is particularly relevant for ethnic discrimination, as names often function as strong signals of ethnic background. Correspondence experiments show that such signals influence employer decisions (Bertrand & Mullainathan, 2004; Zschirnt & Ruedin, 2016). Removing names, nationality, or photographs can reduce both statistical discrimination and taste-based discrimination.

In both forms of discrimination anonymization is especially effective in the resume screening stage, where decisions are made quickly and based on limited information. Once candidates are invited to interviews, identity becomes visible again, and discrimination may reappear.

In contrast, anonymization is less effective for age discrimination. Even if age is not explicitly stated, it can often be inferred from information such as graduation dates or length of work experience (Berry & Herbert, 2012). From a signalling perspective,

these indirect signals still allow recruiters to make assumptions about age. So, age-related bias may still remain even in anonymous recruitment.

Anonymous recruitment still has clear limitations. If a recruiter has strong preferences or expectations, these may still affect decisions later in the process, for example during interviews. So anonymization mainly helps at the beginning of recruitment, but not necessarily at every stage. From a signalling theory perspective, this limitation can be explained by the reintroduction of identity cues in later stages of recruitment (Spence, 1973)

4.2 Effect of anonymous recruitment on fairness

There is strong evidence that discrimination happens early in the hiring process, especially when applications are first reviewed. That is exactly the stage anonymization tries to change. Lippens et al. (2023) found that minority applicants received about 15.8% fewer positive responses and 17.8% fewer interview invitations than majority applicants with the same qualifications.

There is also some evidence that anonymization works in practice. A study from Finland found that when identifying information was removed from applications, the difference between majority and minority applicants disappeared. Meanwhile, the quality of hires did not decrease (Kanninen & Kiviholma, 2024). The pilot showed that organizations can improve equal treatment without lowering the quality of recruitment. Similar results have been found in other contexts for example, in orchestra auditions, candidates performed behind a screen so that judges could not see them and the anonymization increased the chances of women moving forward in the process (Goldin & Rouse, 2000).

Applicants do not only care about the final hiring decision but the process itself also matters. Recruitment is more likely to feel fair when procedures are consistent and

understandable (Gilliland, 1993). Anonymous recruitment may strengthen these perceptions because personal background details are less visible during screening. In this sense, anonymization may strengthen perceptions of procedural fairness, because candidates know that background characteristics are less visible during screening.

Anonymous recruitment can improve the first screening stage but challenges related to fairness can still remain in interviews and final selection decisions. When candidates understand how decisions are made, they are more likely to see the process as fair (Gilliland, 1993). Truxillo et al. (2002) suggest that candidates react more positively to recruitment processes when the procedures are explained clearly, the evaluation criteria are understandable, and applicants feel they are treated consistently throughout the selection process. For example, using the same interview questions for all candidates and applying consistent evaluation criteria may reduce subjective judgments during recruitment (Wolgast et al., 2017).

Structured procedures may help recruiters focus more on job-related qualifications instead of personal impressions. Clear evaluation criteria and transparent decision-making matter throughout the whole recruitment process. Anonymous recruitment can support fairer hiring, but only when it is combined with broader practices that promote objectivity and consistency.

4.3 What limits the effectiveness of anonymous recruitment

Organizational practices, labour market conditions, and wider social factors can all influence how well anonymization works in practice (Adamovic, 2022). The structure of the recruitment process also matters. Anonymous recruitment mostly affects the first screening stage when identity signals are hidden (Rinne, 2018). Later, recruiters usually meet the applicants face to face and at the interview personal impressions can still influence decisions. From the perspective of signalling theory, identity signals are not removed completely, they only disappear for a while.

Organizations also differ in how recruitment is handled. Discrimination is more likely in less structured recruitment processes and in jobs that involve customer contact (Adamovic, 2022). In these situations, recruiters may rely more on personal impressions or assumptions when evaluating applicants. Organizations that use structured evaluation criteria and standardized hiring procedures may reduce bias more effectively (Adamovic, 2022).

Anonymous recruitment aims to hide identity-related information, but some organizations also want to improve diversity within their workforce. Anonymous recruitment can make this more difficult, because employers cannot see if underrepresented groups are included in the process (Krause et al., 2012). Behaghel et al. (2015) found that anonymous CVs did not always improve outcomes for minority applicants and in some situations even reduced their chances of receiving interview invitations. Anonymous recruitment may remove information also that employers would otherwise interpret positively. In practice organizations may need to balance different goals at the same time.

Wider social and labour market conditions also shape recruitment outcomes. Adamovic (2022) argues that discrimination in recruitment depends on organizational and occupational contexts. For example, bias may become more visible in jobs involving customer contact or in recruitment processes that rely heavily on subjective impressions (Adamovic, 2022) Wider social inequalities can also affect recruitment outcomes. People do not all have the same access to education, work experience, or professional networks, and these differences may already influence applicants' opportunities before the recruitment process even begins (Zschirnt & Ruedin, 2016).

Creating a fair hiring process requires more than anonymous recruitment. Removing removing personal information from applications may help reduce bias, recruitment outcomes are influenced by more than the information visible in an application.

5 Conclusions

This thesis looks at whether anonymous recruitment can make hiring processes more equal and reduce discrimination. The study focused mainly on the early stages of recruitment because that is the point where employers review applications and decide who moves forward. Previous findings highlight that recruitment decisions are not always based only on qualifications. Signals such as names, ethnicity, gender, or age may have an influence on how applicants are evaluated (Bertrand & Mullainathan, 2004).

Anonymous recruitment aims to change this by removing personal details from applications. The goal is to reduce unconscious bias during screening which makes it more likely that candidates are evaluated based on their skills and experience (Krause et al., 2012). It can also be explained with signalling theory where employers use different signals to form an impression of candidates (Spence, 1973). Some signals are related to skills, but others are about identity. Anonymous recruitment hides some of these identity signals, which can reduce bias in the beginning but it does not remove them completely. In cases of ethnic discrimination this seems to be especially useful where names can strongly affect how candidates are evaluated (Zschirnt & Ruedin, 2016).

While making hiring processes anonymous can reduce hiring discriminations, it has its limitations because anonymization works only at the beginning of the recruitment process. Hiding identity information may make recruitment more equal, especially at the initial screening stages of hiring (Kanninen & Kiviholma, 2024). Anonymous recruitment may help organizations focus more on qualifications and reduce unequal treatment at the beginning of the process but once candidates move to interviews, their identity becomes visible again and at that point, bias can still affect decisions (Rinne, 2018). So discrimination does not necessarily disappear, it can just show up later in the process.

Anonymous recruitment may improve the chances of people getting invitations to interviews but fairness in recruitment involves more than simply determining who gets selected. Fairness is evaluated often based on consistency, transparency, and how they are treated during recruitment (Gilliland, 1993). Even if early stages become more equal, later stages may still feel unfair if decisions are inconsistent or unclear.

The effectiveness of anonymous recruitment depends on the situation and the organization. In some workplaces, recruitment processes are more structured and objective, while in others recruiters may rely more on personal impressions or assumptions (Adamovic, 2022). Anonymization cannot fully remove wider inequalities in the labour market. Not everyone has the same access to education, work experience, or professional networks, and these differences may still influence recruitment outcomes even when applications are anonymized (Zschirnt & Ruedin, 2016).

This study is based on existing literature and previous research but many studies on anonymous recruitment focus mainly on the first stage of hiring. There is still less research about what happens in later stages of recruitment and how discrimination may continue after screening.

Anonymous recruitment can make hiring more fair, but only to a certain extent. It works best in the early screening stage, but it cannot solve all the problems. To improve fairness more effectively, it should be combined with other practices, such as clear evaluation criteria and consistent decision-making (Adamovic, 2022). Anonymous recruitment is a useful tool, but organizations need to focus on every stages in recruitment process if they want to reduce discrimination and make hiring truly fair.

AI usage report

AI was used to support different stages of the thesis process. The model used was ChatGPT 5.2. AI was utilized for generating ideas for the topic, supporting the scope of the research, and helping to structure the thesis and formulate section headings.

In the final stage, AI was used to improve the clarity of the text, and partly to summarize text written by the author.

AI was used in a supporting role, while all content-related decisions and conclusions of the thesis were made by the author.

References

- Adamovic, M. (2022). When ethnic discrimination in recruitment is likely to occur and how to reduce it: Applying a contingency perspective to review resume studies. *Human Resource Management Review*, 32(2), 100832. Retrieved February 18, 2026, from <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.hrmr.2021.100832>
- Anand, A., James, L., Varma, A., & Dhal, M. (2024). Age is just a number, but with number comes prejudice: Exploring workplace ageism and charting directions. *International Journal of Organizational Analysis*, 32(10), 2436–2467. Retrieved March 2, 2026, from <https://doi.org/10.1108/IJOA-10-2023-4030>
- Barber, A. E. (1998). *Recruiting employees: Individual and organizational perspectives*. Sage Publications. Retrieved February 18, 2026, from <https://doi.org/10.4135/9781452243351>
- Berry, J., & Herbert, J. (2012). Don't pre-judge candidates. *Recruiter*, 22. Retrieved March 1, 2026, from <https://www.recruiter.co.uk>
- Behaghel, L., Crépon, B., & Le Barbanchon, T. (2015). Blind recruitment of minority workers: Evidence from a field experiment. *American Economic Journal: Applied Economics*, 7(3), 1–27. Retrieved March 10, 2026, from <https://doi.org/10.1257/app.20140185>
- Bertrand, M., & Mullainathan, S. (2004). Are Emily and Greg more employable than Lakisha and Jamal? A field experiment on labor market discrimination. *American Economic Review*, 94(4), 991–1013. Retrieved February 18, 2026, from <https://doi.org/10.1257/0002828042002561>
- Collard, D. (1972). Review of *The economics of discrimination*, by G. S. Becker. *The Economic Journal*, 82(326), 788–790. Retrieved March 2, 2026, from <https://doi.org/10.2307/2230052>
- Derous, E., & Pepermans, R. (2019). Gender discrimination in hiring: Intersectional effects with ethnicity and cognitive job demands. *Archives of Scientific Psychology*, 7, 40–49. Retrieved February 25, 2026, from <https://doi.org/10.1037/arc0000061>

- European Commission: Directorate-General for Justice and Consumers, Chopin, I., & Germaine, C. (2026). A comparative analysis of non-discrimination law in Europe 2025. Retrieved March 6, 2026, from <https://data.europa.eu/doi/10.2838/6732664>
- Foley, M., & Williamson, S. (2018). Does anonymising job applications reduce gender bias? Understanding managers' perspectives. *Gender in Management: An International Journal*, 33(8), 623–635. Retrieved February 18, 2026, from <https://doi.org/10.1108/GM-03-2018-0037>
- Gilliland, S. W. (1993). The perceived fairness of selection systems: An organizational justice perspective. *The Academy of Management Review*, 18(4), 694–734. Retrieved March 2, 2026, from <https://doi.org/10.2307/258595>
- Goldin, C., & Rouse, C. (2000). Orchestrating impartiality: The impact of “blind” auditions on female musicians. *American Economic Review*, 90(4), 715–741. Retrieved February 19, 2026, from <https://doi.org/10.1257/aer.90.4.715>
- Greenwald, A. G., & Krieger, L. H. (2006). Implicit bias: Scientific foundations. *California Law Review*, 94(4), 945–967. Retrieved March 4, 2026, from <https://doi.org/10.2307/20439056>
- Kanninen, O., & Kiviholma, S. (2024). Anatomy of an anonymous hiring pilot. Retrieved March 8, 2026, from <https://labore.fi/julkaisu/anatomy-of-an-anonymous-hiring-pilot/>
- Krause, A., Rinne, U., & Zimmermann, K. F. (2012). Anonymous job applications in Europe. *IZA Journal of European Labor Studies*, 1(1), 1–20. Retrieved February 18, 2026, from <https://doi.org/10.1186/2193-9012-1-5>
- Lippens, L., Dalle, A., D'hondt, F., Verhaeghe, P., & Baert, S. (2023). Understanding ethnic hiring discrimination: A contextual analysis of experimental evidence. *Labour Economics*, 85, 102453. Retrieved February 18, 2026, from <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.labeco.2023.102453>
- Morin, S. L. (2024). Name bias: Application through the 4-step process using foundations of critical theory in organizational settings. *Business Ethics and*

- Leadership, 8(1), 163–171. Retrieved February 20, 2026, from [https://doi.org/10.61093/bel.8\(1\).163-171.2024](https://doi.org/10.61093/bel.8(1).163-171.2024)
- Rinne, U. (2018). Anonymous job applications and hiring discrimination. IZA World of Labor. Retrieved March 7, 2026, from <https://doi.org/10.15185/izawol.48.v2>
- Spence, M. (1973). Job market signaling. *The Quarterly Journal of Economics*, 87(3), 355–374. Retrieved February 24, 2026, from <https://doi.org/10.2307/1882010>
- Truxillo, D. M., Bauer, T. N., Campion, M. A., & Paronto, M. E. (2002). Selection fairness information and applicant reactions: A longitudinal field study. *Journal of Applied Psychology*, 87(6), 1020–1031. Retrieved March 11, 2026, from <https://doi.org/10.1037/0021-9010.87.6.1020>
- Van Borm, H., Dhoop, M., Van Acker, A., & Baert, S. (2020). What does someone's gender identity signal to employers? *International Journal of Manpower*, 42(2), 290–308. Retrieved March 9, 2026, from <https://doi.org/10.1108/IJM-03-2019-0164>
- Vermeiren, L. (2021). The state of hiring discrimination: A meta-analysis of (almost) all recent correspondence experiments. Retrieved February 26, 2026, from <https://ideas.repec.org/p/zbw/glodps/972.html>
- Whitney, K. (2014). When selection ends and discrimination begins. *Diversity Executive*, 7(1), 21–23. Retrieved February 18, 2026, from <https://research-ebsco-com.proxy.uwasa.fi>
- Wolgast, S., Bäckström, M., & Björklund, F. (2017). Tools for fairness: Increased structure in the selection process reduces discrimination. *PLOS ONE*, 12(12), e0189512. Retrieved May 23, 2026, from <https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0189512>
- Zschirnt, E., & Ruedin, D. (2016). Ethnic discrimination in hiring decisions: A meta-analysis of correspondence tests 1990–2015. *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*, 42(7), 1115–1134. Retrieved February 20, 2026, from <https://doi.org/10.1080/1369183X.2015.1133279>