The Commission des droits de la personne et des droits de la jeunesse measures discriminatory hiring practices: It’s easier when your name is Bélanger, not Traoré

Montréal, May 29, 2012 – When you’re looking for a job in the Montréal area, it’s easier when your name is Bélanger or Morin, not Traoré, Ben Saïd or Salazar. Equally-skilled and qualified candidates are 60% more likely to be invited to a job interview when their family name is of Québécois origin than if it sounds like a name of African, Arab or Latin-American origin.

This is what a Commission des droits de la personne et des droits de la jeunesse study published today reveals. The “testing”, which aimed to measure the extent of discriminatory hiring practices, revealed a net discrimination rate of 35%. In other words, one in three people whose name identified them with a racialized group was excluded from the interview process.

The idea of this study came about as a result of discussions begun in November 2008 when the Commission organized a conference bringing together more than 400 participants focusing on the integration of immigrants and the right to work without discrimination (Pour une véritable intégration : droit au travail sans discrimination). One of the topics discussed was the apprehensions of some employers about hiring recent immigrants.

Despite the fact that Québec has been responsible for choosing its immigrants in the “skilled workers” category for the past 15 years based on criteria designed to facilitate the selection of candidates most likely to integrate successfully, they face considerably more socioeconomic challenges than those born in Québec or long-established immigrants from Europe. In recent years, it has often been said that their area of training and their work experience were not properly tailored to Québec’s labour market. It is also widely taken for granted that non-recognition of diplomas and of experience gained abroad contributes substantially to the social and professional integration challenges facing newcomers.

“This study reminds us that the workforce integration challenges that certain ethnic and racialized groups face, whether they are immigrants or not, are not only due to skill and experience issues, but also to employers’ discriminatory preferences,” said the president of the Commission des droits de la personne et des droits de la jeunesse, Gaétan Cousineau.

The study, headed by Paul Eid, a sociologist with the Commission, shows that employers tend, often unconsciously, to seek out “people like themselves”, or sometimes even tend to avoid certain groups that are perceived negatively within Québec society.

By conducting a “testing”, a method of measuring discrimination by sending out fictitious résumés that has proved its worth in North American and European settings, the Commission was able to measure the extent of discrimination racialized minorities face when looking for employment in the francophone sector of the Montréal labour market. Five distinct employment fields were examined.

Between December 2010 and May 2011, a research assistant responded to 581 job offers from private companies, government agencies and non-profit organizations. The jobs were in three fields of skilled employment (marketing, human resources and communications), and covered professions within which members of racialized minorities are underrepresented, and in two fields that required little or no qualifications (customer service and secretarial work).

For each of these fields, two applicant profiles were created, both consisting of a résumé and a cover letter. Pairs of résumés were reviewed and calibrated by human resource
experts from each field in order to ensure that both applicants’ work experience and qualifications matched the job requirements, whether the applicant’s name was foreign-sounding or Franco-Québécois. The “twin” résumés were designed to be as similar as possible. All of the fictitious candidates had work experience, studied or earned degrees in Québec.

The “testing” revealed that the discrimination rates vary very little whether the tested organization is a private company (37%) or a non-profit organization (35%). However, of the 18 public sector employers that showed an interest in at least one of the fictitious candidates, five gave preference to the minority candidate, five to the majority candidate, while eight others invited both applicants to an interview, therefore establishing a net discrimination rate of 0%. Such a result, although based on a small sample, may be due in part to the fact that public sector employers are required by law to implement equal access to employment programs that have an impact on recruitment.

The Commission study also showed that applicants with African-sounding names were significantly more disadvantaged than applicants with Arabic or Latin American names. An applicant with an African-sounding name applying for a job that requires few or no skills was assessed most negatively, with a net discrimination rate of 42.1%, compared to a rate of 35.1% for an Arab candidate, followed far behind by a Latin American candidate with a rate of 28.3%. When it comes to skilled employment, the discrimination rate against an applicant with an African-sounding name was 38.3%, compared to a rate of 33.3% for an Arab candidate and of 30.6% for a Latin American candidate.

Furthermore, the Commission tested the hypothesis that discrimination might be more pronounced in skilled employment sectors that offer good salaries and working conditions when compared to low-skilled, low-paid employment offering poor working conditions. This hypothesis was disproved as the results are comparable for the two employment sectors.

However, contrary to what one might think, the discrimination rate was lower for jobs requiring frequent contacts with the public (marketing, communications and customer service) than for employment calling for daily interaction with colleagues in the course of providing services internally (secretarial work and human resources).

The study, Mesurer la discrimination à l’embauche subie par les minorités racisées : résultats d’un « testing » mené dans le Grand Montréal, is available for download (in French) from the Commission’s website at: www.cdpdj.qc.ca.

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