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## Blind recruitment trial to boost gender equality making things worse, study reveals

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UPDATED FRI 30 JUN 2017, 10:49 AM AEST



PHOTO Studies show men are employed at twice the rate of women based on CVs.

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A measure aimed at boosting female employment in the workforce may actually be making it worse, a major study has found.

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### Key points:

- Public service leaders are being told to "hit pause" on blind recruitment trials
- The measure was aimed at boosting female employment by removing indications of gender from job applications
- Professor Michael Hiscox, the academic who oversaw the trial, says results have shown "the opposite" and is urging caution

Leaders of the Australian public service will today be told to "hit pause" on blind recruitment trials, which many believed would increase the number of women in senior positions.

Blind recruitment means recruiters cannot tell the gender of candidates because those details are removed from applications.

It is seen as an alternative to gender quotas and has also been embraced by Deloitte, Ernst & Young, Victoria Police and Westpac Bank.

In a bid to eliminate sexism, thousands of public servants have been told to pick recruits who have had all mention of their gender and ethnic background stripped from their CVs.

The assumption behind the trial is that management will hire more women when they can only consider the professional merits of candidates.

Their choices have been monitored by behavioural economists in the Prime Minister's department — colloquially known as "the nudge unit".

Professor Michael Hiscox, a Harvard academic who oversaw the trial, said he was shocked by the results and has urged caution.

"We anticipated this would have a positive impact on diversity — making it more likely that female candidates and those from ethnic minorities are selected for the shortlist," he said.

"We found the opposite, that de-identifying candidates reduced the likelihood of women being selected for the shortlist."

The trial found assigning a male name to a candidate made them 3.2 per cent less likely to get a job interview.

Adding a woman's name to a CV made the candidate 2.9 per cent more likely to get a foot in the door.

"We should hit pause and be very cautious about introducing this as a way of improving diversity, as it can have the opposite effect," Professor Hiscox said.

## New findings throw other trials into doubt

The landmark study throws doubt on several trials launched by state Government's and individual departments.

Last year, the Australia Bureau of Statistics doubled its proportion of female bosses by using blind recruitment.

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Professor Hiscox said he discussed the trial with the ABS and did not consider it a rigorous or randomised control trial, warning against any "magic pill" solution.

He was also keen to point out the public service has a long way to go on gender equality, saying attention should now turn to creating more flexible working conditions and training.

Men continue to outnumber women at senior ranks of the public service, despite vastly outnumbering men at the rank-and-file level.

"There has been a lot of effort made to improving diversity in the public servants and the subjects of our trial were fairly senior," Professor Hiscox said.

"This project shows the status quo at the moment is to be supportive of hiring more women in the public service."

POSTED **FRI 30 JUN 2017, 5:15 AM AEST**

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