

# Out of work? Your resume is no good here

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(PhysOrg.com) -- When the unemployed complain of fighting an uphill battle to reenter the job market, believe them.

Through a series of simple experiments, researchers from UCLA and the State University of New York–Stony Brook found that out-of-work Americans face discrimination that is unrelated to their skills sets or to the conditions of departure from their previous [jobs](#).

"We were surprised to find that, all things being equal, [unemployed](#) applicants were viewed as less competent, warm and hireable than employed individuals," said lead researcher Geoffrey Ho, a doctoral student in human resources and organizational behavior at the UCLA Anderson School of Management. "We were also surprised to see how little the terms of departure mattered. Job candidates who said they voluntarily left a position faced the same stigma as job candidates who said they had been laid off or terminated."

The findings will be presented at an April 1–2 conference on unemployment at UCLA.

With a special emphasis on the psychological impact of being out of work, the conference, "Reconnecting to Work: Consequences of Long-Term Unemployment and Prospects for Job Creation," will bring together Ho and 31 other researchers on labor and unemployment.

"To our knowledge, this is the first study to examine the psychological stigma of unemployment," said Margaret Shih, a co-author on the study

with Ho and an associate professor of human resources and organizational behavior at UCLA Anderson. "We found that individuals tend to make negative associations with those who are unemployed, which often leads to unfair discrimination."

Researchers have long known of the existence of a bias against the unemployed, said the study authors, who also include Todd L. Pittinsky, an associate professor of technology and society at Stony Brook, and Daniel Walters, a UCLA Anderson M.B.A. student.

In fact, economists have determined that the longer individuals remain unemployed, the lower their chances of finding work. But until now, the situation has been attributed to legitimate concerns over the unemployed worker's skills set or a lack of persistence in looking for work.

"Economists have tended to chalk up long-term unemployment to the probability of skill decay or discouragement, or employers' perceptions of skill decay," Shih said. "But we're finding that when there's no evidence that skills have deteriorated, out-of-work job applicants are still at a disadvantage. The stigma may help explain why the unemployed may have systematically lower chances of reconnecting to work."

For a series of studies, Ho, Shih and their colleagues recruited a random cross-section of Americans over the Internet and had them appraise fictitious job candidates. The researchers found that even when study participants were evaluating the same evidence about a job applicant, the unemployed applicant was at a disadvantage compared with the employed applicant.

In one study, Ho and Shih presented study participants with the same fictitious resume. They told half the participants that the resume belonged to an employed person and the other half that it belonged to a person who was out of work. The researchers then asked participants to

rank the worker on qualities that have been shown by psychological research to be paramount in forming a desirable impression of an individual.

Although all participants saw exactly the same resume, they perceived the "unemployed" resume as belonging to somebody who was less competent, warm and proactive than the "employed" resume. As a consequence, participants reported that they would be less willing to interview or hire the individual who was out of work than the employed individual.

Ho and Shih found the same results when participants were presented with a short video of a job interview, a richer source of information about the supposed job candidate. Participants who believed the job candidate was employed perceived the interview to be more impressive than participants who believed the job candidate was unemployed.

The researchers also discovered that providing different reasons for unemployment did not alleviate the stigma. It made no difference whether the job applicant was unemployed because he left voluntarily or was terminated or laid off. Only when the job loss was in no way attributable to the individual — such as bankruptcy on the part of the employer — did the disadvantage of being unemployed disappear.

Moving forward, the UCLA–Stony Brook team plans to explore what, if any, role the state of the economy plays in the psychological stigma of unemployment. They also plan to sample human relations professionals to determine whether they share the same prejudices as the general public.

For more information about "Reconnecting to Work: Consequences of Long-Term Unemployment and Prospects for Job Creation," visit [ucla.in/fXvsMu](http://ucla.in/fXvsMu)

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