

In job market, social contacts help men, not women

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When it comes to finding a job, who you know is as important as what you know. Work experience generally helps people foster the kinds of personal contacts that can lead someone to new career opportunities, but a study from North Carolina State University shows that this is really only true for men. The study finds that work experience doesn't improve women's chances of finding a job through social contacts.

"The study finds that [work experience](#) is important, in large part because it helps us develop [social connections](#) that can help people learn about future [job opportunities](#)," says Dr. Steve McDonald, an assistant professor of sociology at NC State and author of a paper describing the study. "However, while men reap the social benefits of work experience, women do not."

Using a national dataset of more than 12,000 people, McDonald examined the role work experience plays when people find [new jobs](#) through their social connections. McDonald found that men who had lots of specialized work experience were often recruited into a new job through their social contacts without having to look for a job. In fact, men with this kind of experience were 12 percent more likely to find a new job through informal recruitment than they were through a formal job search.

Women, however, did not see this benefit. They were no more likely to find a job through informal recruitment than they were through a formal [job search](#).

"Previously, researchers have argued that women face lower-wage payoffs than men with similar work experience because the women have fewer opportunities to develop job skills," McDonald says. "But this study suggests that a lack of useful social connections may also be driving the gender wage gap."

This [gender disparity](#) is especially problematic for women who are vying for high-wage, managerial jobs – because these positions are often filled through the informal recruiting process that appears to favor men. "As a result," McDonald says, "the more that can be done to institute formal hiring practices, the closer we will be to an equitable job market."

"We need to learn more about exactly why women don't get the same benefits from their social connections that men do," McDonald says. "But right now, we just don't have the long-term data we need on these social networks to fully understand this phenomenon."

More information: The paper, "What You Know or Who You Know? Occupation-specific work experience and job matching through social networks," is forthcoming from *Social Science Research*.

Provided by North Carolina State University

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