

Job ads should be worded wisely to encourage women to apply

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Using the wrong type of words in a job advertisement can discourage women from applying. This is one of the findings from a study by Lien Wille and Eva Derous of Ghent University in Belgium. The research is published in Springer's journal *Sex Roles*. Wille and Derous recommend that human resources professionals carefully consider the kind of message and type of words they use in job ads when they aim to recruit women.

Qualification-based targeted recruitment strategies aim to increase the number of qualified applicants from certain social groups, such as women. Typically, such strategies assume that people are more likely to apply for a job when they fulfil the specified requirements.

In two experimental studies using 401 Belgian university students seeking employment, Wille and Derous looked at how job seekers react to stereotypical person requirements and how these requirements are worded in job advertisements.

The researchers found that women job seekers were less likely to apply for possible openings when personality requirements were mentioned in a trait-like way, rather than in a task-directed way. For example, women perceived sentences such as "You are calm/not nervous" as less encouraging compared to task-directed ones like "You always remain calm under pressure". This preference has to do with the way in which women are often stereotypically portrayed.

"Job-seeking women might fear that they too will be judged stereotypically if they apply," explains Wille. "This underlines that the way job ads are written may have a discriminatory effect even when there is no discriminatory intent."

"These findings indicate that qualification-based targeted recruitment initiatives can backfire but that organizations might attract a high quality and gender-diverse applicant pool by 'getting the words right'," adds Derous, who says that job ads targeted at women job seekers should highlight the preferred behaviour of potential candidates.

The researchers hope that their study will stimulate more research about the conditions under which targeted recruitment initiatives work for [women](#) job seekers and any other social group that is underrepresented in the labour market.

More information: *Sex Roles* (2018). [DOI: 10.1007/s11199-017-0877-1](#)

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