

Having the right name helps one to find housing

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Discrimination against ethnic minorities on the housing market is declining—in Germany and other Western European countries and in the USA. But a new meta-study shows that applicants' surnames still influence the selection of new tenants.

Over the past four decades, the incidence of housing discrimination

against members of ethnic minorities has fallen in both Western European countries and the US. This is the principal finding of a meta-analysis summarizing the results of 71 empirical studies (field experiments) performed during the period between 1973 and 2015. "We found that the overall extent of discrimination is overestimated in the literature. This is partly attributable to the fact that studies which found a relatively high level of discrimination have a better chance of being published," says LMU sociologist Katrin Auspurg, first author of the new study, published together with her colleague Andreas Schneck and Professor Thomas Hinz of the University of Constance. The paper was published in the *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*.

Nevertheless, reassessment of the data from the field experiments shows that housing discrimination on ethnic grounds has not disappeared. The evidence overall indicates the continuing existence of discrimination against applicants whose surnames suggest that they belong to an [ethnic minority](#). The significance of this factor can be quantified by evaluating the number of applications that are needed to get a positive response by landlords. "On average, members of ethnic minorities must send out six applications in order to be invited to two showings of an apartment. The corresponding number for applicants with last names that are typical for the majority population is only five," says Auspurg. Her meta-analysis also revealed that this result can often be attributed to what is called statistical discrimination: On the basis of a surname that is typical for an ethnic minority, the landlord often infers that an applicant is likely to be in a weaker financial position than other applicants. "In most field experiments, the level of discrimination significantly decreased when applications included further information relating to the applicant's social status and income level."

Auspurg and her colleagues have carried out their own field experiments in Munich and other German cities. The results suggest that there are no defined hotspots of discrimination; the level of discrimination is pretty

much the same everywhere. In future studies, she wants to focus more on exploring the underlying causes of ethnic [discrimination](#). In addition, her team is currently teasing out the contribution of an applicant's social network to success in the search for rental accommodation. But other factors must also be taken into account. "It's not just a matter of finding accommodation as such. The size and location of one's apartment are of great significance for many other aspects of everyday living. But the more urgent issue is that members of ethnic minorities should be able to find affordable accommodation in the first place."

More information: Katrin Auspurg et al. Closed doors everywhere? A meta-analysis of field experiments on ethnic discrimination in rental housing markets, *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies* (2018). [DOI: 10.1080/1369183X.2018.1489223](#)

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