

# If you're a man, working part-time can reduce your chances of getting a new job as much as unemployment does.

[blogs.lse.ac.uk/usappblog/2016/09/02/if-youre-a-man-working-part-time-can-reduce-your-chances-of-getting-a-new-job-as-much-a](https://blogs.lse.ac.uk/usappblog/2016/09/02/if-youre-a-man-working-part-time-can-reduce-your-chances-of-getting-a-new-job-as-much-a)

9/2/2016

*Unemployment often has wide-ranging negative consequences for those who experience it, including making it harder to get a new job. But what effect does part-time work or work in a job below a person's skill level have? In new research, [David S. Pedulla](#) investigates the effects of these 'nonstandard' and 'mismatched' jobs on people's employment chances. By sending out thousands of fake job applications for male and female applicants with distinct employment histories, while holding all else constant, he finds callback rates for men in full-time employment was 10.4 percent, compared to 4.8 percent for those in part-time work and 4.7 percent for those in jobs below their skill level. By contrast, women in full-time and part-time work had little difference in their callback rates.*



Most of us have family members, friends, or acquaintances that have experienced unemployment. It can be a brutal experience, economically, socially, and psychologically. A large body of academic research backs this up. There are [far-reaching consequences](#) of being unemployed. These effects span many domains of life, from health, to family dynamics, to psychological wellbeing. There is also evidence that unemployment can lead to lower earnings down the road.

Following on this line of research, a recent body of scholarship has asked whether there is also a direct effect of unemployment on being able to get a new job. In other words, do employers screen out job applicants who are unemployed in favor those who are currently working?

In general, the answer appears to be “yes.”

To investigate this issue, separate teams of researchers in the United States and Sweden sent fake job applications to apply for real job openings and randomly assigned some of those job applications an employment gap: a spell of unemployment. The studies found that employers tended to pass over the unemployed applicants in favor of applicants who were employed. The effects were strongest for [longer-term](#) unemployment (rather than short periods without a job) and [current spells](#) of unemployment (rather than unemployment in the past).

## It's not just unemployment that affects future job opportunities

While unemployment is certainly an important social and economic experience, it is not the only type of position in the labor market that deviates from having a full-time, standard job. In fact, millions of workers in the United States labor in nonstandard jobs, such as [part-time work](#), as well as mismatched positions, such as jobs below their skill or [education level](#).

Yet, these types of positions in the labor market generally receive less attention than unemployment, particularly with regard to how they affect future employment opportunities.

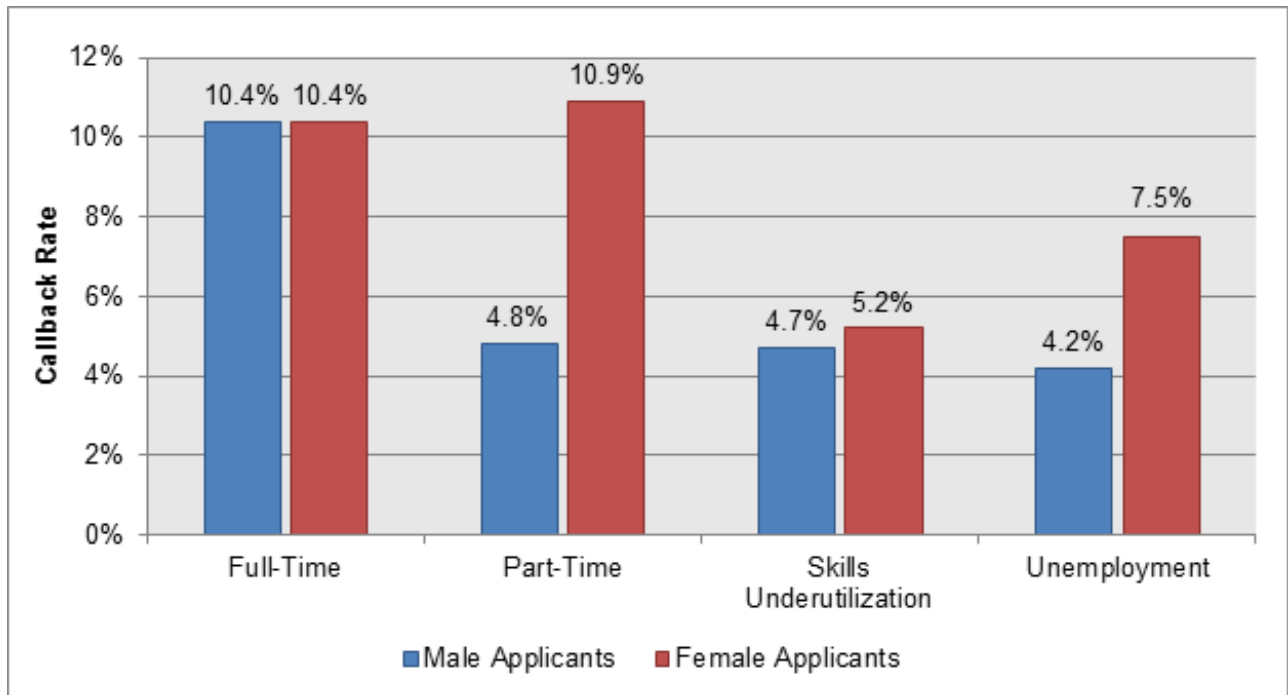
To address this gap in the research, I decided to ask the following question: How do employers treat job applicants employed in part-time positions or in jobs below their skill level, compared to applicants who remain in full-time jobs at their skill level as well as applicants who are unemployed?

To tackle this question, I used similar methods to those that had been deployed to study the effects of unemployment on hiring outcomes. I sent out thousands of fake job applications to apply for real job openings

across four types of occupations in five cities: Boston, Atlanta, Chicago, New York, and Los Angeles. I randomly assigned the applicants different employment experiences in the 12 months leading up to submitting their application, including: a full-time job at their skill level, a part-time job, a job below their skill level, or unemployment. I also varied the gender of the applicant using male and female names.

What did I find?

**Figure 1- Callback Rates, by Employment History and Gender**



### **The Gendered Consequences of Part-Time Work**

The results of my [study](#) reveal important gender differences in the consequences of part-time work. For male job applicants, being employed in a part-time position is severely penalizing. Male job applicants with full-time, standard jobs received “callbacks” (positive responses) from employers 10.4 percent of the time. However, the callback rate dropped to 4.8 percent for men in part-time positions. The callback rate for men in part-time positions was very similar to the callback rate for men who were unemployed (4.2 percent).

By contrast, women in part-time positions faced no penalty compared to women who remained employed full-time. Women in full-time jobs received callbacks 10.4 percent of the time, compared to 10.9 percent for women in part-time positions. Indeed, women in part-time positions received a statistically significantly higher callback rate than men in part-time positions.

### **A Job below One’s Skill Level**

While there were important gender differences in the treatment of applicants with part-time employment histories, taking a job below one’s skill level affected men and women in similar ways.

Compared to the 10.4 percent callback rate for men in full-time positions at their skill level, men who took jobs below their skill level were called back only 4.7 percent of the time. Men in these positions of skills underutilization were treated no differently by potential employers than men who were unemployed, who received a 4.2 percent callback rate. Similarly, women in full-time, standard jobs at their skill level received callbacks 10.4 percent of the time, compared to 5.2 percent of the time in positions of skills underutilization.

Thus, for both men and women, taking a job below their skill level was severely penalizing compared to remaining in a full-time job that utilized their skills and experience.

## Beyond Unemployment

Unemployment is, of course, extremely important and has far-reaching consequences for workers and their families. But, the effects of part-time work and skills underutilization are also real and affect millions of workers in the United States. Yet, they are less frequently discussed and sometimes remain absent from our thinking about labor market inequality.

Situating part-time work and skills underutilization alongside unemployment as we think about interventions and policies to address labor market challenges is an important step toward ameliorating the various challenges faced by workers in the contemporary economy.

*This article is based on the paper, 'Penalized or Protected? Gender and the Consequences of Nonstandard and Mismatched Employment Histories', in the American Sociological Review.*

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