ECONOMIC VIEW

Biased Algorithms Are Easier to Fix Than Biased People

Racial discrimination by algorithms or by people is harmful — but that's where the similarities end.

By Sendhil Mullainathan

Dec. 6, 2019

In one study published 15 years ago, two people applied for a job. Their résumés were about as similar as two résumés can be. One person was named Jamal, the other Brendan.

In a study published this year, two patients sought medical care. Both were grappling with diabetes and high blood pressure. One patient was black, the other was white.

Both studies documented racial injustice: In the first, the applicant with a black-sounding name got fewer job interviews. In the second, the black patient received worse care.

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