

Job loss can make you sick, new study finds

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In the face of rising unemployment and businesses declaring bankruptcy, a new study has found that losing your job can make you sick. Even when people find a new job quickly, there is an increased risk of developing a new health problem, such as hypertension, heart disease, heart attack, stroke or diabetes as a result of the job loss. The study will be published in the May 8 issue of *Demography*.

"In today's economy, job loss can happen to anybody," said Kate Strully, who conducted the research as a Robert Wood Johnson Foundation Health and Society scholar at the Harvard School of [Public Health](#). "We need to be aware of the health consequences of losing our jobs and do what we can to alleviate the negative effects."

Workers who are in poor health have a 40 percent increase in the odds of being laid off or fired, but Strully's findings go beyond sicker people being more likely to lose their jobs. She finds that "job churning," defined as high rates of job loss but low unemployment, has negative health consequences for workers who were not already sick. For those who lost their job—white or blue collar—through no fault of their own, such as an establishment closure, the odds of reporting fair or poor health increased by 54 percent, and among respondents with no pre-existing health conditions, it increased the odds of a new health condition by 83 percent. Even when workers became re-employed, those workers had an increased risk of new stress-related health conditions.

Unlike the results of job loss due to an establishment closure, when health effects were analyzed based on workers who were fired or laid

off, significant differences were found based on the workers' occupations. While being fired or laid off or leaving a job voluntarily more than doubles the odds of a fair or poor health report among blue-collar workers, such job displacements have no significant association with the health reports of white-collar workers. The reasons for this disparity are unclear based on the study results.

"As we consider ways to improve health in America during a time of economic recession and rising unemployment, it is critical that we look beyond health care reform to understand the tremendous impact that factors like job loss have on our health," says David R. Williams, Norman Professor of Public Health at the Harvard School of Public Health, Professor of African and African American Studies and of Sociology at Harvard University and staff director of the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation Commission to Build a Healthier America. "Where and how we live, work, learn and play have a greater impact on how healthy we are than the health care we receive."

The study was conducted based on data from the U.S. Panel Study of Income Dynamics, a nationally representative survey from 1999, 2001 and 2003. The study looked at establishment closures that included a range of occupations, including managerial or professional positions (30 percent displacement), sales, clerical, and craft jobs, (33 percent displacement), a machine operator jobs (20 percent displacement), and service positions (13 percent displacement).

Source: Robert Wood Johnson Foundation Health & Society Scholars

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