

Looming unemployment harms older workers' health

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Downsizing and demotions at the workplace can be a health hazard for people over age 50, according to research reported in a recent issue of the *Journals of Gerontology Series B: Psychological and Social Sciences* (Volume 65B, Number 1).

A team of researchers found that job insecurity increased the chance of harmful effects for a sample of older workers in Cook County, IL. Over time, men reacted with greater physical symptoms, while changes in [psychological health](#) were more prominent in women.

"Older adults in the United States are living longer and working harder," said lead author Ariel Kalil, PhD, a professor at the University of Chicago. "Increased exposure to the labor market brings increased exposure to employment challenges."

The new findings are based on a study of approximately 200 residents of Cook County aged 50 to 67. The participants were considered to have experienced job insecurity if they reported that they were disciplined or demoted at work or if their employer downsized or reorganized.

Job insecurity was not associated with [health](#) outcomes for all individuals uniformly. After a period of two years, the men who had faced job insecurity were more likely to experience poorer self-rated health, higher blood pressure, and higher levels of epinephrine (a stress-induced hormone). When faced with the same workplace conditions, women showed higher levels of hostility, [loneliness](#), and [depressive symptoms](#).

The researchers chose to focus on [older workers](#) for several reasons. People aged 55 and older have experienced strong growth in the labor market over the past 20 years — a trend expected to continue in the decade ahead. Additionally, a 2007 AARP study found that a full 70 percent of working adults between 45 and 74 years old planned to work during retirement or to never retire at all.

More information: www.geron.org/publications/the%20journal%20of%20gerontology:%20psychological%20sciences

Provided by The Gerontological Society of America

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