

Unemployed Americans face greater risk of mortality: study

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Employment policy is also health policy according to a University of British Columbia study that found that workers experienced higher mortality rates if they didn't have access to social protections like employment insurance and unemployment benefits.

Researchers with the Human Early Learning Partnership and the School of Population and Public [Health](#) at UBC found that low and medium-skilled workers in the United States are at a greater risk of death if they lose their job than their German counterparts, who have access to more robust employment protections and insurance.

"Employment insurance makes a difference to the health of the most vulnerable populations, low-wage and poorly educated workers," said Chris McLeod, the lead researcher on the paper and a post-doctoral fellow with the Human Early Learning Partnership. "For low-wage and poorly educated workers, it's not just about losing your job but losing your job and being at the bottom of the [labour market](#)."

The study, published online earlier this month in the [American Journal of Public Health](#), compared [mortality rates](#) of unemployed minimum, medium and high-skilled workers in Germany and the United States of America between 1984 and 2005. While researchers found an increased risk of dying for all unemployed workers, the relative risk was higher for U.S. workers in almost all situations. Unemployed minimum and medium skilled Americans were about seven and 3.5 times more likely to die than employed high skilled Americans or Germans.

The U.S. and Germany are the world's two most successful economies but differ significantly in their [employment policies](#). Germany, a coordinated market economy, has high levels of both employment protection – restrictions on terminating employees – and unemployment protection – availability of [unemployment benefits](#). The United States, a liberal market economy, has low levels of employment and unemployment protection. The study found that 75 per cent of unemployed German workers received unemployment compensation compared to only 19 per cent of U.S. workers.

Canada was not included in the study but has a liberal market economy similar to the U.S. The Canadian government is currently implementing reforms to the country's employment insurance system, which may reduce benefits to low-income and low-skill workers.

"It is important that we recognize how changes to employment and unemployment protections could inadvertently affect the health of the most vulnerable populations," said McLeod.

In a second study, published earlier this year in the [Annual Review of Public Health](#), the researchers, along with Harvard University professor Peter Hall, looked at the policies that could help mediate health inequalities among [workers](#).

The researchers found that broader employment and social policies that included training and education opportunities, [employment](#) security, access to housing and welfare, and benefits to low-income families were important social protections.

"The wear and tear of daily life is important to everyone's health," said Hall. "As these findings show, social policy matters not only to people's well-being but to the very length of their lives."

More information: *American Journal of Public Health* study:
[ajph.aphapublications.org/doi/ ... 105/AJPH.2011.300475](http://ajph.aphapublications.org/doi/.../105/AJPH.2011.300475)

Annual Review of Public Health study: bit.ly/Mwbt4w

Provided by University of British Columbia

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