

IU studies find workplace and financial stress lead to poor health choices

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Two studies from the Indiana University School of Public Health-Bloomington highlight the negative impact workplace and financial stress can have on health behaviors. The lead author urges workplace wellness and smoking cessation programs to consider such impacts as the economy sputters along.

A study published online in the journal *Nicotine & Tobacco Research* found that men and women who smoked daily reported that their [smoking](#) increased when conflict from work affected their home life. Women also reported the inverse: increased smoking when home conflict affected their work.

A second study published in the journal *Social Science & Medicine* looked at health behaviors practiced by almost 4,000 men and women before and after the recession began in 2008. Health behaviors, such as exercise and attention to nutrition, generally improved as the recession set in—except for study participants who reported financial struggles.

"There's growing evidence that work-family conflict is related to a range of negative health behaviors, and it's something for workplace wellness programs to take into consideration when they're trying to get employees to engage in healthier behaviors, whether it's physical activity, nutrition or quitting smoking," said Jon Macy, lead author of both studies and assistant professor in the Department of Applied Health Science at the School of Public Health-Bloomington.

The study "The association between work-family conflict and smoking quantity among daily smokers," involved 423 adult Midwesterners who smoked daily. The study is unique because it examined the behavior of smokers; earlier studies tended to examine whether someone smoked, not whether the quantity of smoking fluctuated.

"Wellness programs are becoming increasingly prevalent in the workplace," Macy said. "If a program is going to deal with smoking, given how difficult it is for people to quit, it might be more successful by looking at some of the underlying issues. Our findings suggest that work-home conflict is one area that should be looked at and addressed in cessation counseling."

The study also found that employees who reported more lenient workplace smoking restrictions smoked more.

"It's another intervention that seems to work," Macy said. "We know from lots and lots of research that smoke-free air policies in the workplace result in reduced smoking either in the form of quitting or smoking fewer cigarettes per day."

Participants for both studies were drawn from the IU Smoking Survey, a longitudinal study that began in 1980. The study "Predictors of health behaviors after the economic downturn: a longitudinal study" involved 3,984 men and women ages of 37 to 50.

The researchers asked study participants about five health behaviors:

- Whether they looked at food labels to determine food's health value when they shopped.
- How often they chose what to eat based on food's health value.
- How frequently they performed vigorous physical activity.
- Whether they always wore seatbelts.

- Whether they smoked.

They looked for a relationship between these behaviors and three work-related factors:

- Change in work hours.
- Change in employment status—full time, part time, unemployed, temporarily laid off or student employment.
- Financial strain related to basic needs.

Overall, health behaviors improved after the recession, which is a finding of some previous studies.

"When you look at the entire sample, [health behaviors](#) improved during a period that included a major recession," Macy said. "However, those most affected by the recession, those with the most financial strain, were least likely to abstain from smoking, to exercise or to engage in healthy eating behaviors."

Workplace wellness programs have become increasingly common. Yet the people who need them the most might no longer be working, which is why it's so important during an economic downturn for these wellness opportunities to be available through community-based organizations, such as park districts or YMCAs, Macy said.

More information: "Predictors of health behaviors after the economic downturn: a longitudinal study," *Nicotine & Tobacco Research*

"The association between work-family conflict and smoking quantity among daily smokers," *Social Science & Medicine*

Provided by Indiana University

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