

New study explores link between economic shock and physical inactivity

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A new study published in the *American Journal of Lifestyle Medicine* finds critical links between job loss and physical inactivity in young adults during the U.S. Great Recession of 2008-09 that can be crucial to

understanding the role of adverse economic shocks on physical activity during the COVID-19 pandemic. It is the first study to examine how job losses during the Great Recession affected the physical activity of young adults in the United States.

The study by Dickinson College economist Shamma Alam and Harvard T. H. Chan School of Public Health economist Bijetri Bose looked at Panel Study of Income Dynamics (PSID) data for young adults age 18 to 27—a phase of development associated with maturation and significant social, psychological and economic changes. They found that job losses experienced by the individual during the Great Recession reduce the likelihood of physical exercise by a significant 6.3 percentage points. This is in line with action plans established by the World Health Organization and United Nations call for a 10 percent reduction in [physical inactivity](#) by 2025 and 2030, respectively.

"Our study finds that young adults from the Great Recession, who form the core part of the millennial generation today, suffered from significantly lower physical activity, which typically leads to worse physical health outcomes such as increased obesity," said Alam. "The Great Recession—considered the longest since the Great Depression—presents enormous economic implications and lessons that are relevant for the current COVID-19 induced economic downturn."

While the Great Recession had a disproportionately high 19% [unemployment rate](#) among young adults, unemployment for young adults during the COVID-19 pandemic has been much higher, peaking in 2020 at approximately 33 percent for those age 16-19; 26 percent for those age 20-24; and 16 percent for those age 25-29. Additionally, according to Pew Research, young adults age 18-29 also have—more than any other age group—used money from their savings or retirement account, borrowed money from friends or family and received unemployment benefits since the coronavirus hit in February 2020.

Alam suggested these known decreases in physical activity during significant economic downturns also could have implications for the mental health of young adults. "Physical activity significantly went down following job losses during a major recession like the Great Recession likely because of negative mental health outcomes suffered by the individuals. When individuals are worried about their jobs and livelihood, they do not feel like exercising. Therefore, we are likely to see similar effects on physical activity during the current COVID-19 induced recession," said Alam, adding that in addition to job losses, stay-at-home orders had negative effect on [young adults](#)' mental health, which may then negatively affect [physical activity](#).

More information: Shamma Adeeb Alam et al, The Great Recession and Physical Activity of Young Adults, *American Journal of Lifestyle Medicine* (2021). [DOI: 10.1177/15598276211008400](https://doi.org/10.1177/15598276211008400)

Provided by Dickinson College

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