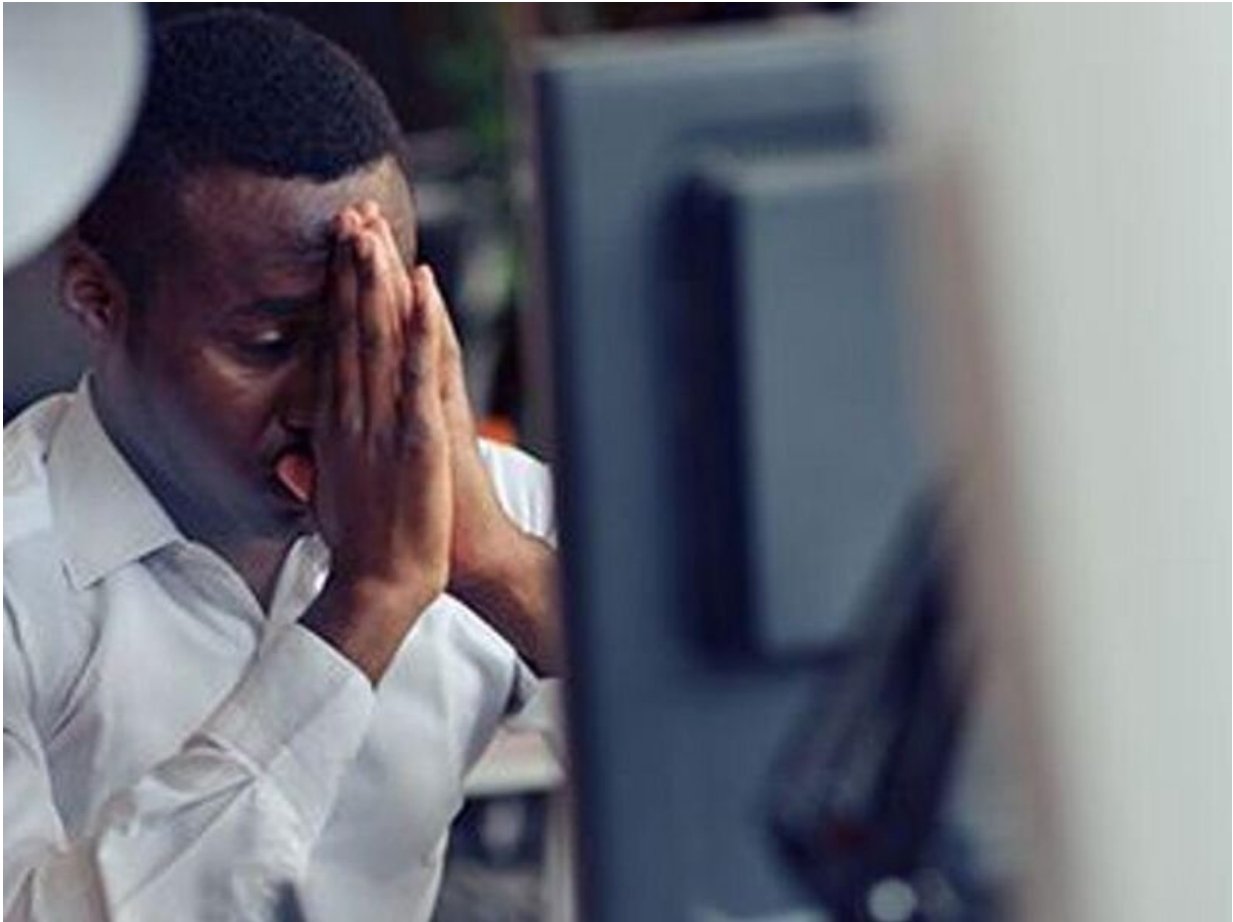


Sustained low wages tied to early death risk

February 27 2023, by Lori Solomon



Sustained low-wage earning is associated with elevated mortality risk and excess deaths, according to a study published in the Feb. 21 issue of the *Journal of the American Medical Association*.

Katrina L. Kezios, Ph.D., from the Mailman School of Public Health at Columbia University in New York City, and colleagues examined the association of sustained low-wage earning and mortality. The analysis included 4,002 U.S. participants (aged 50 years and older) in the Health and Retirement Study (1992 to 2018) who reported earning hourly wages at three or more time points during a 12-year period during their midlife.

The researchers found that those who had never earned [low wages](#) experienced 199 deaths per 10,000 person-years versus 208 deaths per 10,000 person-years for intermittent low wages and 275 deaths per 10,000 person-years for sustained low wages. When adjusting for key sociodemographic variables, sustained low-wage earning was associated with higher mortality (hazard ratio [HR], 1.35; 95 percent confidence interval [CI], 1.07 to 1.71) and excess deaths (HR, 66; 95 percent CI, 6.6 to 125). However, these associations were weakened with additional adjustments for economic and health covariates.

For workers with sustained low-wage exposure and employment fluctuations, there were significant excess death and elevated mortality risks noted (e.g., for sustained low-wage × employment fluctuated: HR, 2.18 [95 percent CI, 1.35 to 3.53]; for sustained low-wage × stable employment: HR, 1.17 [95 percent CI, 0.89 to 1.54]; P for interaction = 0.003).

"If causal, our findings suggest that social and [economic policies](#) that improve the financial standing of [low-wage](#) workers (e.g., minimum wage laws) could improve mortality outcomes," the authors write.

More information: Katrina L. Kezios et al, History of Low Hourly Wage and All-Cause Mortality Among Middle-aged Workers, *JAMA* (2023). [DOI: 10.1001/jama.2023.0367](https://doi.org/10.1001/jama.2023.0367)

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