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Men who lose their jobs at greater risk of dying prematurely

McGill sociologist finds strong correlation between unemployment and mortality

Research by McGill Sociology Professor Eran Shor, working in collaboration with researchers from Stony Brook University, has revealed that unemployment increases the risk of premature mortality by 63 per cent. Shor reached these conclusions by surveying existing research covering 20 million people in 15 (mainly western) countries, over the last 40 years.

One surprising finding was that, in spite of expectations that a better health-care system might contribute to lower mortality rates, the correlation between unemployment and a higher risk of death was the same in all the countries covered by the study.

The truly groundbreaking aspect of the research is that it suggests that there is a causal relationship between unemployment and a higher risk of death.

"Until now, one of the big questions in the literature has been about whether pre-existing health conditions, such as diabetes or heart problems, or behaviours such as smoking, drinking or drug use, lead to both unemployment and a greater risk of death," Shor said. "What's interesting about our work is that we found that preexisting health conditions had no effect, suggesting that the unemployment-mortality relationship is quite likely a causal one. This probably has to do with unemployment causing stress and negatively affecting one's socioeconomic status, which in turn leads to poorer health and higher mortality rates."

The research also showed that unemployment increases men's mortality risk more than it does women's mortality risk (78 per cent vs. 37 per cent respectively). The research also showed that there is a much

higher correlation between unemployment and mortality for men than for women (78 per cent vs. 37 per cent). The risk of death is particularly high for those who are under the age of 50.

"We suspect that even today, not having a job is more stressful for men than for women." Shor said.

"When a man loses his job, it still often means that the family will become poorer and suffer in various ways, which in turn can have a huge impact on a man's health by leading to both increased smoking, drinking or eating and by reducing the availability of healthy nutrition and health care services."

The research suggests that public-health initiatives could target unemployed people for more aggressive cardiovascular screening and interventions aimed at reducing risk-taking behaviours.

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For an abstract of the article: <http://www.sciencedirect.com/science/journal/02779536>

The full article is available on request.

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