

Unemployment and Health

What We Know

Being laid off can put a significant amount of stress on both body and mind. In America, job loss and job availability has been a hot topic ever since the great recession of 2008. Involuntary job loss and perceived job loss can have a great number of negative health consequences. These include chronic illness, decreased mental health, and substance abuse.

Perceived Job Loss and Stress

The effects of unemployment do not begin the moment that a person loses their job. During the Great Recession, many jobs were at risk and many people feared for their jobs. Perceiving job insecurity has many long-term effects on health^{1,2}. People who perceived job insecurity during the recession were more likely to report a diagnosis of a chronic illness. These included high blood pressure, coronary heart disease, depression, or anxiety attacks². Before the recession, people who believed their job were at risk ended up having a higher prevalence of chronic health issues compared to those who did not perceive job insecurity¹. The stress of potential job insecurity puts both physical and mental strain on the body. Even just the threat of job loss can have long-term effects. This in turn could affect job performance and chances of future unemployment.

Job Loss and Vulnerable Populations

When a person loses their job, the health risks tend to vary. Age, education, type of job, and economic conditions at the time of job loss all can influence health later in life⁶. Those who are most likely to lose their job tend to be young, African American, Hispanic, and have less education^{2, 5, 7, 8}. When people lose their job, they often report having worse health or a chronic illness⁶. People who have worse health are also more likely to experience job loss⁸. Many risk factors could influence unemployment and physical health. These include age, education, or race.

Unemployment and Mental Health

Unemployment has a wide range of mental health risks associated with it. These include suicide and alcohol or drug abuse^{3,4,5}. Suicide rates tend to increase among the unemployed. Recent job loss due to mass-layoff was associated with increased suicide for both genders. Mass layoffs often represent loss of social support and fewer prospects of finding a new job³. Just as suicide rates increase with unemployment, so does drug and alcohol abuse. Tobacco use, illegal drug use, and alcohol consumption were all most frequently used in unemployed groups⁴. Smoking also tends to continue even after an unemployed person becomes re-employed⁵. Substance abuse also tends to lead to other health issues that could influence the ability to work even after they find employment.

Implications for Harrisonburg/Rockingham

The biggest local industries in H/R are poultry processing, education, and healthcare. Unemployment rates are in line in March 2016 with Virginia rates of 4%.⁹ However, as noted above, for those who are unemployed, there are concerns of increased rates of substance abuse and perpetration of domestic violence. Substantial numbers of local adults have lifestyle health risks related to nutrition, weight, physical inactivity, tobacco and alcohol.¹⁰ Domestic violence

can also increase with unemployment, and domestic violence is cited by local stakeholders as one of the top twenty local issues.¹⁰

There are many local agencies to assist with unemployment. People who are unemployed can file unemployment claims with the Virginia Employment Commission. Job placement assistance for clients is also available through Mercy House and Bridge of Hope Harrisonburg-Rockingham. Blue Ridge Community College offers strong career enhancement and continuing education, and there are many career opportunities available through Massanutten Technical center. Our Community Place offers employment counseling. Blue Ridge Area Health Education Center and Virginia Workforce Development both assist individuals with career development.

There are also local agencies to assist clients with concerns related to unemployment. Free smoking cessation classes are offered to all United Way partner agencies and their clients. The Collins Center is a valuable local resource for prevention and education about sexual assault. The Medical Suitcase Clinic also assists clients with applications for social services.

References

- ¹ Burgard, S. A., Brand, J. E., & House, J. S. (2009). Perceived job insecurity and worker health in the united states. *Social Science & Medicine*, 69(5), 785-9p. doi:10.1016/j.socscimed.2009.06.029
- ² Burgard, Kalousova, & Seefeldt. (2012). Perceived job insecurity and health. *Journal of Occupational and Environmental Medicine*, 54(9), 1101-1106. Retrieved from <http://content.wkhealth.com/linkback/openurl?sid=WKPTLP:landingpage&an=00043764-201209000-00006>
- ³ Classen, T. J., & Dunn, R. A. (2012). The effect of job loss and unemployment duration on suicide risk in the united states: A new look using mass-layoffs and unemployment duration. *Health Economics*, 21(3), 350-13p. doi:10.1002/hec.1719
- ⁴ Compton, W. M., Gfroerer, J., Conway, K. P., & Finger, M. S. (2014). Unemployment and substance outcomes in the united states 2002-2010. *Drug & Alcohol Dependence*, 142, 353-4p. doi:10.1016/j.drugalcdep.2014.06.012
- ⁵ Golden, S. D. 1. & Perreira, K. M. 2. (2015). Losing jobs and lighting up: Employment experiences and smoking in the great recession. *Social Science & Medicine*, 138, 110-118. doi:10.1016/j.socscimed.2015.06.003
- ⁶ Pearlman, J. (2015). The consequences of job displacement for health: Moderating influences of economic conditions and educational attainment. *Social Science Research*, 52, 570-587. doi:10.1016/j.ssresearch.2015.04.006
- ⁷ Schaller, J. & Stevens, A.H. (2015). Short-run effects of job loss on health conditions, health insurance, and health care utilization. (2015). *Journal of Health Economics*, 43, 203-14p. doi:10.1016/j.jhealeco.2015.07.003

⁸ Strully, Kate W (Kate Wetteroth). (2009). Job loss and health in the U.S. labor market. *Demography*, (2), 221.

⁹ Department of Numbers. Retrieved 5/27/2016 from
<http://www.deptofnumbers.com/unemployment/virginia/harrisonburg/>

¹⁰ Community Health Solutions. (2015). A community health needs assessment prepared for Sentara Rockingham Memorial Hospital. Retrieved from
<http://www.sentara.com/Assets/Pdf/About-Us/Community-Health-Needs-Assessments/SRMH-2015-Community-Health-Needs-Assessment.pdf>