

University of Minnesota study: 2008-2009 recession-related job loss may have led to psychological distress and increased alcohol related problems, especially among African Americans

MINNEAPOLIS/ST. PAUL (March 22, 2016) – A new study from the University of Minnesota’s [School of Public Health](#) finds individuals who lost their jobs during the 2008-2009 economic recession reported increased drunkenness and reported more alcohol use disorders. This was especially true for African Americans compared to Whites.

Results of the study were published today in [Journal of Studies on Alcohol and Drugs](#).

Recession-related job loss was also associated with an increase in psychological distress or depressive symptoms, and in turn increased drunkenness among African Americans only, suggesting that distress is another pathway by which job loss affects alcohol use disorder among African Americans. The study also found higher levels of family social support lessened the effects of job loss on psychological distress among all racial and ethnic groups in the sample.

“Losing a job is stressful for everyone but we found this is especially true for African Americans,” said [Rhonda Jones-Webb, Ph.D.](#), lead author and professor of epidemiology and community health in the University of Minnesota’s School of Public Health. “Oftentimes these individuals have less economic resources to cope with the added stress a job loss entails, which can lead to psychological distress and increased alcohol use.”

A previous study by the Alcohol Research Group, a program of the Public Health Institute, found African Americans and Hispanics were more likely to report a job loss during the 2008-2009 recession and that African Americans were more likely than Whites to report alcohol-related problems. Jones-Webb’s study sought to identify the mechanisms by which job loss leads to alcohol problems and potential ways to target prevention and treatment efforts for those individuals who are most adversely affected by economic downturns.

Jones-Webb suggests that clinical staff provide greater attention to the role of social support as a protective factor in mitigating the effects of job loss on distress. For African Americans in particular, this may include identifying sources of social support outside of their family such as friends, neighbors or community leaders. These results may have implications for preventing alcohol-related problems among high-risk groups.

“We hope the conceptual model we tested will spur additional research on the subject, provide a guide for clinicians working with the African American community as well as other racial and ethnic minority populations, and help policymakers develop policies to reduce future alcohol-related problems during economic downturns like we saw in 2008-2009.”

Media note: The University of Minnesota is equipped with a ReadyCam video studio. Please contact Matt DePoint (medepoint@umn.edu) if you would like to arrange a live or recorded interview with Dr. Jones-Webb.

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For more than 60 years, the University of Minnesota School of Public Health has been among the top accredited schools of public health in the nation. With a mission focused on research, teaching, and service, the school attracts nearly \$100 million in sponsored research each year, has more than 100 faculty members and more than 1,300 students, and is engaged in community outreach activities locally, nationally and in dozens of countries worldwide. For more information, visit www.sph.umn.edu. The School's Centers for Public Health Education and Outreach promotes lifelong learning to bridge academic and public health practice communities.