

Researchers study the effects of parental job loss on families during the pandemic

8 December 2020, by Ingrid Wright, Amanda Cody

A team of UTSA researchers has discovered that economic implications because of COVID-19 can have a devastating ripple effect on children. Monica Lawson, assistant professor of psychology, Megan Piel, assistant professor of social work and Michaela Simon, psychology graduate student in the UTSA College for Health, Community and Policy, have recently [published a research article](#) on the effects of parental job loss during the COVID-19 pandemic and risk of psychological and physical abuse toward children.

Using a community sample of 342 parents of 4- to 10-year-olds living in the United States, the researchers investigated factors associated with child maltreatment during the pandemic.

"We know that risk for child abuse increases during [economic crises](#). We saw this during the Great Depression and the Great Recession and our study expanded this research to the COVID-19 pandemic," said Lawson. "We found that job loss due to the pandemic was associated with abuse towards children. Our study is unique by showing that positive [coping strategies](#), however, can mitigate the risk for [physical abuse](#) against children, even among families where a parent lost their job."

The study included parental job loss and whether cognitive reframing moderated associations between job loss and child maltreatment. The researchers asked study participants to complete online questionnaires regarding their experiences with COVID-19, parental behaviors towards children, including psychologically and physically abusive behaviors, and coping strategies.

The research findings demonstrate that parental job loss due to the pandemic can have [negative consequences](#) on young children, including increased risk for psychological and physical abuse at the hands of their parents.

Another research finding demonstrates, however, that among parents who lost their jobs, physical abuse toward children decreased as parents engaged in more positive coping strategies. That is, parents who view hardships as something they can overcome without becoming too discouraged were less likely to physically abuse their children during the pandemic, even if they lost their jobs.

Importantly, these findings emerged when statistically controlling for whether families had a history of psychological and physical abuse before the pandemic, child and parent age and gender, parental depression, and family [financial stability](#).

The researchers also found that the findings have consequences for economic policies and employment practices, but also indicate that focusing on parental mental health and, in particular, fostering healthy coping strategies among families is important during times of economic crises and may help to reduce family violence, including child abuse.

Lawson explains "We're just starting to understand the impact of the pandemic on family functioning and well-being." She adds, "Understanding factors that contribute to child abuse during the pandemic is critical for identifying at-risk families and providing services to protect children. This is especially important within the unique context of the pandemic when many children are at home and out of sight of mandated reporters."

More information:

[hcap.utsa.edu/wp-content/uploa ... 647785582.1605084202](https://hcap.utsa.edu/wp-content/uploads/2020/12/647785582.1605084202)

Provided by University of Texas at San Antonio

APA citation: Researchers study the effects of parental job loss on families during the pandemic (2020, December 8) retrieved 1 May 2021 from <https://medicalxpress.com/news/2020-12-effects-parental-job-loss-families.html>

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