

Unemployment makes women more likely to be victims of crime

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Crime and unemployment are linked, but not always in the ways we think they are.

Thanks to the work of three UK researchers, it's now clear that in some circumstances female unemployment – rather than unemployment as a whole – makes the biggest difference to rates of violent and property crimes.

Writing in the journal *Applied Economics*, Steve Cook and Duncan Watson (both from the University of Wales Swansea) and Louise Parker (from the University of East Anglia) take a closer look at two ways that unemployment impacts on [crime](#): the 'opportunity' effect (a strong economy means more goods worth stealing, and fewer people sat at home to guard them) and the 'motivation' effect (a weak economy widens perceived differences between lifestyles and can tempt some into crime).

After crunching data gathered from the US Bureau of Labor and the FBI's Uniform Crime Reporting Statistics, the team analysed them further for gender effects. Their most important finding was that female unemployment but not male unemployment showed 'significant opportunity effects for aggregate [violent crime](#), aggregate property crime and components of violent crime.' In other words, high female unemployment means a higher likelihood of higher crime rates.

Contrary to the expectations of previous studies, the opportunity effects

here are counter-cyclical. Their results did not support the traditional 'latchkey' theory that high female employment increases crime because women were working rather than looking after their children.

Their results also did not support the idea that by challenging gender roles, female employment contributes to an increase in crime, especially domestic violence.

Instead, their results supported a 'victimisation' thesis. High levels of female unemployment translate into high numbers of women without the means to escape situations where they are likely to experience crime.

With its innovative approach to examining the relationship between [unemployment](#) and crime, this study provides an important insight into yet another distressing consequence of a weak economy, for women in particular.

More information: New evidence on the importance of gender and asymmetry in the crime–unemployment relationship, Steve Cook, Duncan Watson & Louise Parker, Applied Economics Volume 46, Issue 2, 2014, [DOI: 10.1080/00036846.2013.835481](https://doi.org/10.1080/00036846.2013.835481)

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