

Economic woes create more marital disagreements

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Married couples argue with each other more about finances and other household matters as they cope with economic hardship from the global COVID-19 pandemic.

But these outcomes are similar to what occurred more than a decade earlier, according to a new University of Michigan study that found economic hardships during the 2008 U.S. recession strained household finances and increased marital disagreements.

"Many people are faced with similar stressful experiences today," said Esra Ascigil, the study's lead author and a U-M doctoral student in psychology. "We may expect to see similar findings with [marital problems](#) and [mental health](#), especially if people have fewer resources to cope with these events."

The study examined marital satisfaction as a mechanism linking recession adversities and mental health.

Ascigil and colleagues were interested in the financial adversities people experienced after the 2008 recession began, such as unemployment, increased debt and being threatened with foreclosure or eviction. They also analyzed changes in marriage—how much people disagreed with their spouse on money matters, household tasks and how to spend [leisure time](#)—and changes in their mental health—negative mood, anxiety, depression and inability to feel pleasure.

The researchers used data from the Midlife in the United States project before (2004–2006) and after (2013–2014) the recession. The sample included nearly 1,500 adults between the ages 25-74 who disclosed recession adversities, mental health and household income.

When experiencing a higher number of financial adversities after the recession began, [married couples](#) reported having more disagreements. This, in turn, predicted poor mental health, the study showed.

In addition, individuals who had lower income before the recession showed a stronger association between financial adversities and negative

mood.

More information: Esra Ascigil et al. Integrating models of marital functioning to understand the mental health consequences of the Great Recession, *Journal of Social and Personal Relationships* (2020). [DOI: 10.1177/0265407520918938](https://doi.org/10.1177/0265407520918938)

Provided by University of Michigan

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