

Unemployment substantially increases domestic violence, new study finds

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New research by an international team including Professor Sonia Bhalotra of Warwick Economics and CAGE finds a strong link between job loss and domestic violence. Men who lose their jobs are more likely

to inflict domestic violence, while women who lose their jobs are more likely to become victims. The increases are upwards of 30%. The study discusses carefully designed unemployment benefits as a new approach to policy measures intended to protect women and girls.

Professor Bhalotra says that "domestic [violence](#) has risen worldwide during the coronavirus pandemic, leading the UN to call it a shadow pandemic. The fact that many countries have seen an increase suggests a common cause."

"Our [study](#) uses administrative data from Brazil to understand the effects of job loss and unemployment benefit payments on domestic violence. Our evidence suggests that job loss triggers two mechanisms—income loss, and an increase in potential time at home. The loss of income creates stress within the household, while more time at home increases exposure to the risk of domestic violence."

"While our data predates the pandemic, our results are relevant for the many countries suffering high post-pandemic unemployment. Lockdown mandates have been lifted in many countries, but [unemployment rates](#) look set to rise, tightening income constraints and potentially increasing exposure even in the absence of mobility restrictions."

The study is based on large scale data from Brazil, analyzed by Sonia Bhalotra, Diogo Britto and Paolo Pinotti of Bocconi University in Italy and Breno Sampaio of Universidade Federal de Pernambuco in Brazil.

The researchers analyzed court registers for Brazil that contain every domestic violence case during 2009–2018. In this period there were 2 million domestic violence cases, representing 11% of all criminal justice cases, which were then linked to employment registers, with details of around 100 million workers, 60 million employment spells and 10 million layoffs per year.

The study also included measures of domestic violence that do not rely on victims reporting the event to the police. These are: indicators for women using domestic violence public shelters, and notifications of domestic violence by health providers that are mandated by the federal government.

They find that job loss has a significant effect on domestic violence, and that [unemployment benefits](#) may not mitigate this effect if they lead to men being unemployed for longer. Benefits do, however, have the potential to mitigate the effect if accompanied by policies that encourage men back into work.

Professor Bhalotra added that their "main findings are that [job loss](#) influences domestic violence first by generating an income shortfall, and second by increasing exposure to violence. So, the ideal policy intervention would compensate the income shortfall and get people out of the home and back to work. Unemployment benefits can help but need to be combined with active policies aimed at getting the unemployed back to work. Traditionally, these policies are training and support with job search, but they could include community service."

"The [policy](#) infrastructure has been primarily concerned with providing support to victims in the shape of shelters, counseling and protection orders. Interventions designed to prevent [domestic violence](#) have focused on the economic empowerment of women, though the evidence shows that they misfire in settings where men want to maintain economic control. Our research suggests that it is equally important to consider the economic status of men and the potential for policies that compensate both men and women for income losses."

More information: Domestic violence: the potential role of job loss and unemployment: [warwick.ac.uk/fac/soc/economic ...ations/bn34.2021.pdf](http://warwick.ac.uk/fac/soc/economic...ations/bn34.2021.pdf)

Job displacement, unemployment benefits and domestic violence:
[warwick.ac.uk/fac/soc/economic ... d domestic violence/](https://warwick.ac.uk/fac/soc/economic...d_domestic_violence/)

Provided by University of Warwick

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