

Power at work has payoffs, but not for health

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Being at the top has its perks, but new University of Toronto research shows people in positions of authority at work are more likely to experience certain psychological and physical problems that can undermine the health benefits associated with job authority.

The study - which used data from a national survey of 1,800 American workers in different occupations and sectors - reveals previously undocumented evidence about the up and downsides of having authority in the workplace. [People](#) with job authority are defined as those who direct or manage the work of others, have control over others, pay, and can hire or fire others.

Sociology professor Scott Schieman and PhD student Sarah Reid found people with more authority at work experience certain benefits that can contribute to better [health](#). They tend to earn greater pay and have jobs that involve more problem-solving tasks, making their work more interesting and engaging.

"Unfortunately, there are also downsides to job authority that undermine or offset the upsides of having power at work," says Schieman. "In most cases, the health costs negate the benefits."

People with job authority report significantly higher levels of interpersonal conflict with others, says Schieman. They're also more likely to encounter work-to-home interference, where stressors at work spill over into non-work domains like family and leisure time. These factors increase the risk for [psychological distress](#), anger and [poor health](#).

"Power at work does have drawbacks, and the negative impact on [personal health](#) - both emotional and physical - is one of them," says Schieman, lead author on the study.

These findings help explain a lingering paradox in sociological research about job stress: Higher status positions have attributes that should contribute to less stress and better health, but people with authority at [work](#) don't seem to have better health. This study sheds new light on the underlying dynamics.

More information: The study is appearing online now in the journal *Social Science and Medicine*. www.elsevier.com/locate/socscimed

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