Pandemic Job Separation and Psychological Distress: Modeling Chains of Adversity

Abstract

Although recent studies have linked pandemic unemployment with poorer mental health, the mechanisms underlying this association remain understudied. Professor Terrence Hill developed a mediation model to explain why pandemic job separation might undermine mental health. Using national data from the 2021 *Crime, Health, and Politics Survey* (n = 1,258), it tested the indirect effects of pandemic job separation on psychological distress through several mechanisms. Mediation analyses reveal compound indirect effects of pandemic job separation on psychological distress through the primary pathway of financial strain and the secondary pathways of social support, self-esteem, mastery, religious struggles, and sleep disturbance. Absent the indirect effect of pandemic job separation through financial strain, it would have failed to observe any simple indirect effects through the other proposed mechanisms. Formal moderated mediation analyses also indicate that observed indirect effects are invariant to subgroup differences in current employment status, education, and household income. In short, indirect effects are observed for those respondents who were able to regain employment, those with college degrees, and those with the most financial resources. The results suggest that the temporary expansion of public assistance has been insufficient to offset widespread unemployment and financial hardship during a global pandemic.