Economic recession and Unemployment on Time Spent in Healthy Behaviors

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**INTRODUCTION**


Through the media, we often focus on the financial implications of unemployment and recession: for individuals and families, prior research has documented the long ways of economic insecurity for other aspects of individuals’ lives including health (e.g., Fagnan et al., 1994; Joffres, Letarte, and Zierler 1997). The impact of the recession and unemployment for health is particularly salient in the United States for many reasons including rising health care costs and growing concerns about the obesity epidemic. However, the possible effects of the recession, on individuals’ health are only vaguely understood and it is unclear how these relationships work. Recognizing the importance of the national economic environment for health, I examined following questions by drawing on the American Time Use Survey (ATUS):

- What are the effects of living in recessionary times (2008 through 2009), experiencing unemployment, and their combined effects on time spent exercising or engaging in active travel on an average day?
- Does gender, life stage, and socioeconomic status moderate the relationship between a recessionary climate, unemployment, and time spent in healthy behavior?

**DATA & METHODS**

Data: American Time Use Survey (ATUS)

- The American Time Use Survey (ATUS) is a national, cross-section survey of the civilian non-institutional population age 15 years and older. Conducted at the end of each year through personal interviews and completed in both English and Spanish.

- The survey is conducted by the Bureau of Labor Statistics at the U.S. Department of Labor. The first survey was conducted in 1965 and has been conducted every year since. The survey asks respondents to keep a daily diary of their activities for a full 24 hours.

- The survey excludes institutionalized populations such as prison inmates, prisoners of war, patients in hospitals, and patients in nursing homes.

- The survey sample is designed to be representative of the civilian non-institutional population age 15 years and older. The sample consists of approximately 14,000 participants, with 3,500 respondents in each of the 40 regions of the United States.

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**PRELIMINARY RESULTS**

**Economic climate and employment status significantly predicts active travel but not exercise**

- Percentage of working-aged respondents participating in exercise was not statistically significantly different (alpha=.05) related to employment status or economic climate.
- Time spent exercising was not statistically significantly different (alpha=.05) related to employment status or economic climate.
- Percentage of working-aged respondents participating in active travel was statistically significantly different (alpha=.05) by employment status and by economic climate.
- Time spent in active travel was statistically significantly different (alpha=.05) by employment status and economic climate.
- Percentage participating in exercise and active travel, as well as time spent in these activities are statistically significantly different by gender, life stage, education, and partner/partner’s employment status.
- Socially located, as identified by gender, life stage, education, and partner/partner’s employment status.
- Statistically significant relationships are illustrated below.

**BIVARIATE RESULTS**

**Physical activity is uncommon**

- 16.6% of Americans between the ages of 22 and 34 reported engaging in exercise.
- 78.2% reported watching television during the diary day.
- Those who report exercising, do so for 1 hour and 36 minutes on average.
- Those who report active travel, do so for 26 minutes on average during the diary day.
- Television consumes on average 3 hours and 3 minutes per diary day.

**MULTIVARIATE RESULTS**

**Time Spent Exercising**

- Few of the interactions between employment status and economic climate are statistically significantly different in their time spent exercising and spend, on average, 24 minutes more than the employed before the recession.
- Working-aged respondents who are unemployed at the CPS and the ATUS are statistically significantly different in their time spent exercising and spend, on average, 24 minutes more than the employed before the recession.

**Time Spent in Active Travel**

- Before the recession the unemployed and those out of the labor force spent more time in active travel on average than did the employed during this time (20 minutes and 11 minutes respectively).
- During the recession those unemployed at the CPS and the ATUS spent an average 32 minutes and those out of the labor force spent 17 minutes in active travel in comparison to the employed prior to the recession.
- After the recession, the unemployed and those out of the labor force spent more time in active travel on average than did the employed before the recession.
- The unemployed did not spend statistically significantly different amounts of time in active travel by the economic climate and spent the least amount of time in active travel in comparison to the unemployed or not in the labor force.

**REFERENCES**


