

# Gender Differences in the Effects of Unemployment on Mental Wellbeing

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**Abstract**— *Unemployment is directly affected to widespread poverty and poor quality of life with high domestic overcrowding. High unemployment is frequently associated with adverse environmental conditions and can cause bad mental health outcomes. Many suffer from unemployment but not the same degree. Gender plays a vital role in this regard and has diverse meanings for the unemployment experience depending on the situation. This study examined the gender differences in the effects of unemployment on mental wellbeing. Basically used primary data through telephone conversation from the individuals in Kalutara district in Sri Lanka. Stratified sampling procedure is adopted to select a sample of 252 unemployed workers who aged 25 to 64 years. An ordinary least squares regression is used to test with variables entered stepwise in order to see how the effect of gender on mental health is affected by the control variables. It could found that unemployed are clearly in of poorer quality mental health and they are less self-confident and seem overwhelmed by their problems. Finally, it could conclude that contextual situation affect for the relationship between unemployment, gender and mental health. At the same time, roles and positions of the labour market and in the family creates gendered differences in the relationship between unemployment and mental health.*

**Keywords**— *Gender, Labour market, Mental wellbeing, Unemployment.*

## I. INTRODUCTION

Unemployment rate is a dominant indicator that forms government policies and personal decisions and fundamental measure of economic health. Simultaneously, unemployment suggests that there is a gap of production, consumption and an empty mood [Katsoridas and Lehouritis, 2010]. If persons above a specified age not being in salaried employment or self-employment but currently vacant for labour during the reference period can be defined as unemployment. Unemployment is a worldwide problem which is harmfully affected to the economic as well as communal development of a country. In 2019 world unemployment rate is 5.395 [worldbank.org] and in the Sri Lankan context it is recorded as 4.2. At present it can see that well-educated first time job seekers, youths being unemployed.

Especially unemployed youths are more likely to have poor physical health [Brydsten et al, 2016] often take part in illegal activities [Fergusson et al, 2001] and prompt poorer lifestyle behaviours [Barnes et al, 2009] increased alcohol consumption and substance abuse [Compton et al, 2014]. unemployment in youths has been associated with higher mortality rates due to suicide [Christoffersen et al, 2003], higher alcohol consumption [Eliason, 2014], and is related wide range

of mental health problems; stress [Bjarnason and Sigurdardottir, 2003], decreased mental wellbeing [Bacikova-Sleskova, 2007], lower life satisfaction [Khattab and Fenton, 2009], other psychiatric disorders [Power, 2015] and fall mental health in later life [Strandh, 2014].

Number of researches conducted about the effect of unemployment on mental health but research results have been contradictory due to research methods, populations under study, and interpretations of the data [Margaret, 1985].

Liem and Liem (1979) conducted the work and unemployment project and this panel study check the effects of involuntary loss of jobs by husbands. The results of this study revealed that being without work was strongly associated with higher levels of psychiatric symptoms. Other studies dealing with psychological concerns of unemployment have shown that inpatient first admissions to hospitals in a state system are significantly related to economic depression for low status occupational groups [Barling and Handal, 1980]. Murphy and Athanasou (1999) conducted a meta-analysis and according to the results, unemployment had negative effects on mental health. McKee-Ryan et al (2005) also conducted a meta-analysis to examined the effects of unemployment on wellbeing across 104 empirical studies. It was found that, unemployed individuals had lower mental health compared to employed individuals and reemployment improved mental health. Paul and Moser (2009) used 237 cross sectionals and 87 longitudinal studies to test the association between mental health of unemployed and employed persons. Results from the cross-sectional studies illustrated that unemployed individuals had greater levels of distress and lower wellbeing than employed individuals. Longitudinal studies pointed out a significant growth in distress for individuals that became unemployed.

Unemployed like to find a job but it's challengeable task due to not vacant or an employer does not request to work, thus become a severe psychosocial stressor [Fradelos, 2014]. Unemployed feel rejected by community with the lower self-confidence and practice years of unpleasantness and hindrance and have signs of depression. In this situation they feel guilty about the future life [Fatourou, 2010] and it may be expressed through psychosomatic problems or badly behaved by find a way to alcoholism and substance abuse, even in participating in antisocial groups and other offending activities.

In classical literature, the role of gender in the relationship between unemployment and mental health has been broadly discussed (Jahoda 1982). McKee-Ryan et al. (2005) found that unemployed women have worse mental health and Paul and

Moser (2009) found that men are more distressed than women due to unemployment. The levels of equal opportunity in the labour market and in the family will have real consequences for the way in which gender influences the association between unemployment and mental health [Mattias et al., 2013].

In a dual breadwinner framework, employment rates comparatively parallel to that of men, women in such a framework should face quite similar psychosocial and economic pressures as men when unemployed. The magnitude should be small gender differences in the relationship between unemployment and mental health. Numerous foremost scholars have also put forwarded this is a needed direction for understanding the relationship (Hammarström et al. 2011).

## II. RELATED LITERATURE

Rising unemployment creates massive economic costs in the form of lost income taxes. On the other hand, unemployed workers are less healthy than employed because unemployment itself can lead to a deterioration of health. The quality of nutrition, housing, and health care are hard to obtain for unemployed and financial strain has been initiated to be a significant predictor of psychological distress among unemployed (Kessler et al. 1987). Existing literature documented higher risk of mortality after job displacement for affected workers (Browning and Heinesen 2012). At the same time, few studies have concerned about the adverse consequences of the breadwinner's joblessness on the spouse or children within the household unit (Dew et al., 1991).

The previous researches related to happiness and subjective well-being has revealed that unemployment is affected to lower level of happiness (Stutzer and Lalive 2004). Several studies indicate a positive effect of unemployment on suicide, depression, physician consultations, illness episodes, and substance abuse (Browning and Heinesen 2012). Some researchers show that physical manifestations such as headache, muscle tension or pain, chest pain, fatigue, change in sex drive, upset stomach or sleep problems may be mild to severe (Mayo Clinic, 2011). Dooley et al. (1996) put forwarded that increases in cortisol, prolactin, growth hormone, cholesterol and decreased immune reactions are some physical health problems due to unemployment. According to Brody (1982), every 1% rise in unemployment, deaths from heart disease, cirrhosis of the liver and stress related disorders increase by 1.9%. According to an agency theory, health effects are a cause of the fact that unemployment controls the autonomy of the individual as a vigorous agent, and mainly that the economic constraints make it hard for the individual to plan for the future (Fryer, 1986).

Unemployment's health effects are not yet fully understood over a century of investigation. Aggregate-level studies have usually initiated noteworthy positive relationships over time between joblessness and suicide, and often researched physical wellbeing consequences. These studies formed the outcome of psychiatric treatment rates and cannot be taken at the individual level as indication that unemployment increases the hazard of suicide or mental illness. Brady (1982) found that for each 1% rise in

unemployment, suicides increase 4.1%, homicides 5.7%, however the research discussed that the respondents did not have an increase in anxiety. Most individual- and cross-level studies have concentrated on measures of well-being such as signs of physical or mental distress or dysfunctional behaviours from job loser. There are many unanswered questions about the mechanisms of the unemployment-health. Most of the studies related to unemployment and wellbeing have distinguished about two conditions such as employment vs unemployment and rarely consider the impact of unemployment on special groups and categories such as women, disables, school-leavers, and immigrants (David et al., 1996).

## III. STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

There is a negative effects of unemployment on physical and mental health and well-being. Number of previous studies about unemployment reported indication for consistent significant increases in cortisol, prolactin, growth hormone, cholesterol, and HDL-cholesterol, and decreased immune reactions [Arnetz et al., 1991]. In chorus, unemployment lead to an increase in unhealthy behaviours; alcohol [Dooley et al., 1992] and tobacco consumption [Lee et al., 1991] which lead to subsequently increased risk for disease or mortality.

Unemployment has occurred in the lives of many people in the country during the past decade. Basic life requirements of people are met through occupation and at the same time work satisfy physical needs which helps to maintain good mental health. This directly affected to uphold self-esteem, and provide an avenue for achievement and self-realization. On the contrary, long term unemployment cause to increase anxiety and depression, lead to lower self-esteem, and increase adverse physical health consequences [Vicky et al., 2020] as an effect of the lack of nonfinancial assistances provided by one's profession, such as community status, self- assurance, physical and mental activity, and use of one's skills [Bartley, 1994]. Montgomery (1999) shown that higher levels of depression are a bad result of unemployment. According to results of this study, individual who had recently become unemployed had an adjusted relative risk of 2.10 for depression and anxiety compared to those who had not recently become unemployed.

Different positions and roles existing for men and women in society and their family creates gender difference in the effect of unemployment on mental health. Female character is seen to be less associated with occupation and the income generated by female is taken as a secondary income (Hakim, 1995). Thus, considerable researchers support to the idea that, women suffer less from the unemployment than men (Artazcoz et al. 2004). In recent decades representing that unemployed women miss employment as much as men do and as a result suffer to the equal degree as unemployed men (Hammarström et al. 2011). However, there is an unsettled debate continuing the nature of this association.

And number of researches realized that duration of unemployment, gender, age, social class, ethnicity, the availability of social support, the attitudes of others, economic conditions and the type of work plays a vital role with respect to unemployment (Feather, 1990).

IV. AIM OF THE STUDY

Most of the studies related to unemployment are rarely been addressed about the potential gender differences in reactions to unemployment. Thus the objective of the study is examining gender differences in the effects of unemployment on mental wellbeing.

V. SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

There are few studies conducted related to the role of gender in the association between unemployment and mental wellbeing in developing countries. Through a scientific analysis, this study will provide useful information for policy makers, economists and academic researchers about the unemployment, mental health and role of gender in Sri Lankan context and also the nature of the effects. This will also give directions for academic researchers in their future studies.

VI. METHODOLOGY

Basically used primary data through telephone conversation from the individuals in Kalutara district in Sri Lanka. Stratified sampling procedure is adopted to select a sample of 252 unemployed workers aged 25 to 64 years. Subjects reporting a limiting long-standing illness in the 12 months preceding the survey, were excluded.

Mental health of the subject was measured using General Health Questionnaire [GAQ], a common tool used in unemployment research [Imma et al., 2018]. This measure identifies personality disorders or patterns of adjustment associated with distress. GHQ-12 has been widely used in labour market studies as an indicator of general mental health. The 12 items on the GHQ-12 assesses the severity of a mental problem over the last few weeks using 2- point scoring method rating a problem as no (0) or yes (1). The GHQ questions can be categorised into three parts such as questions related to stress-related indicators and questions for general well-being, decision-making capacity of individuals and questions about individual self-perception.

The questionnaire consisted basically about the questions related to the respondents' background (marital status, age, education, unemployment duration in months), health and well-being, attitude towards work and unemployment, and views of the future. In addition to that, respondents are asked whether they taken a diagnosis from a doctor for illnesses during the last 12 months: chronic back pain, chronic headache, heart attack, stroke, and mental disorder to check whether the respondent has been diagnosed with a mental disorder.

Unemployment duration divided in to 4 categories: less than 6 months, 6 to 12 months, 12 to 24 months, and more than 24 months. Unemployment status classified into 2 categories: fully unemployed and partially unemployed. Marital status was categorized into 2 categories: single and married.

To check whether there is a connection between unemployment and mental health among male and female an ordinary least squares regression is used with variables entered stepwise in order to see how the effect of gender on mental

health is affected by the control variables.

VII. RESULTS

In order to be able to examine the suggestions one wants access to analogous data for unemployed samples from different gender regimes.

TABLE 01. General Characteristics of the Sample Source: Sample Survey 2019

| Variable  | Male % | Female % |
|---|--------|----------|
| • Marital Status                                |        |          |
| Unmarried                                       | 64     | 58       |
| Married   | 36     | 42       |
| • Unemployed Characteristics                    |        |          |
| Fully unemployed                                | 43     | 86       |
| Partially unemployed                            | 57     | 14       |
| • Unemployment Duration                         |        |          |
| Less than 6 months                              | 24     | 20       |
| 6 – 12 months                                   | 13     | 12       |
| 12 – 24 months                                  | 30     | 20       |
| More than 24 months                             | 33     | 48       |
| • Level of Education                            |        |          |
| Primary   | 14     | 17       |
| Secondary                                       | 53     | 62       |
| Tertiary  | 33     | 21       |
| • Age   |        |          |
| 25 – 34   | 22     | 26       |
| 35 – 44   | 17     | 15       |
| 45 – 54   | 20     | 10       |
| 55 – 64   | 41     | 49       |
| • How easily the household is making ends meet? |        |          |
| With no difficulty                              | 15     | 9        |
| With some difficulty                            | 30     | 20       |
| With difficulty                                 | 30     | 40       |
| With great difficulty                           | 25     | 31       |

Table 01 shows a significant difference between the unemployed female and the unemployed male in the sample. The major differences between male and female are that the women are more likely to be fully unemployed and unemployment duration is approximately higher than the male. More than half of the individuals are single and when consider about the age more than half of the sample are in between 45 – 64 age category. Most important thing is approximately 50% of the sample were face difficulty to fulfil their day today essential needs.

Fig. 01 illustrates that Unemployed are clearly in of poorer quality mental health and they are less self-confident and seem overwhelmed by their problems. This poor mental health of unemployed leads to inability to find employment.

In table 02, model 1 take account of only gender and it point outs that unemployed male has worse mental health than unemployed female.

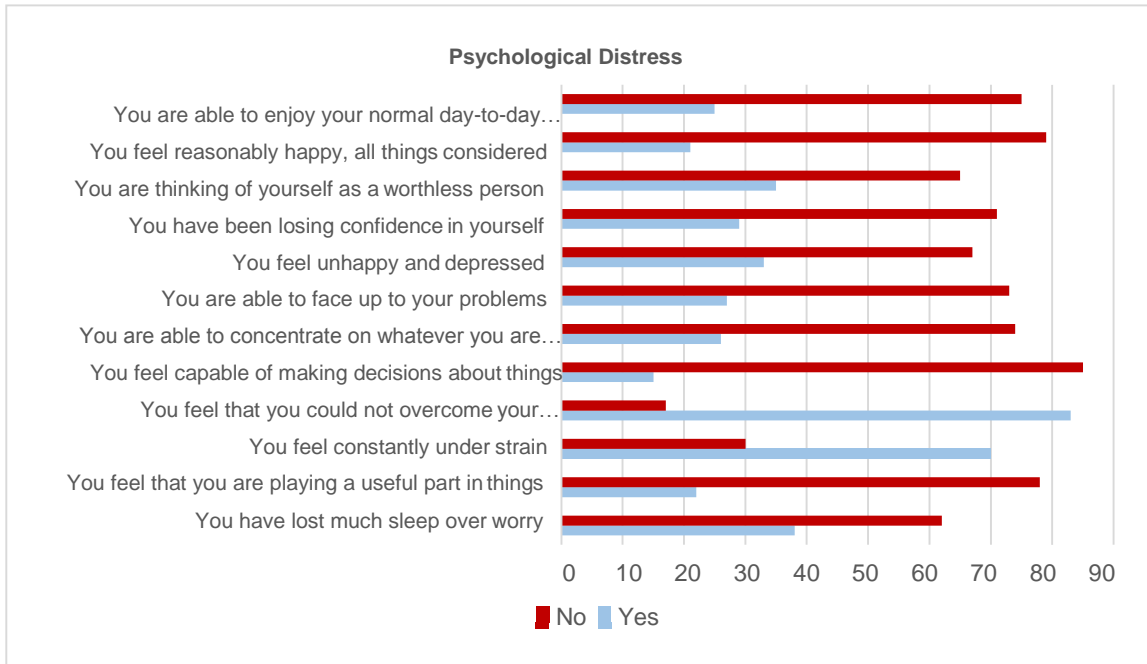


Fig. 01: Distribution of the Psychological Distress among Unemployed Source: Sample Survey 2019 [Measures are the Items included in the general health questionnaire]

TABLE 02: Results of Ordinary Least Squares Regression Source: Sample Survey 2019

| Variable   | Model 01 |      | Model 02 |      | Model 03 |      |
|--|----------|------|----------|------|----------|------|
|  | $\beta$  | SE   | $\beta$  | SE   | $\beta$  | SE   |
| Gender(Male = 0)   |          |      |          |      |          |      |
| Female   | -1.70    | 0.55 | -0.06    | 0.64 | 0.25     | 0.71 |
| Marital Status (Unmarried = 0)                                     |          |      |          |      |          |      |
| Married  |          |      | 3.04     | 0.90 | -0.23    | 1.20 |
| Age (25 – 34 =0)   |          |      |          |      |          |      |
| 35 – 44  |          |      |          |      | 3.41     | 1.10 |
| 45 – 54  |          |      |          |      | 3.39     | 1.20 |
| 55 – 64  |          |      |          |      | 5.18     | 1.41 |
| Level of Education (Primary = 0)                                   |          |      |          |      |          |      |
| Secondary  |          |      |          |      | -0.54    | 0.69 |
| Tertiary   |          |      |          |      | 0.45     | 1.15 |
| Unemployment Duration (months)                                     |          |      |          |      | 0.00     | 0.00 |
| How easily the household is making ends meet? (With no difficulty) |          |      |          |      |          |      |
| With some difficulty   |          |      |          |      | 0.46     | 0.85 |
| With difficulty  |          |      |          |      | 0.75     | 0.94 |
| With great difficulty  |          |      |          |      | 4.31     | 1.00 |
| Intercept  | 50.55    | 0.33 | 49.50    | 0.46 | 47.15    | 1.00 |
| Asdj.R <sup>2</sup>  | 0.01     |      | 0.02     |      | 0.88     |      |

Model 2 includes the variables related to the marital status and their significant interactions with gender. In this model the association between gender and mental health insignificant and completely disappears. Lower mental health among unemployed female than among unemployed male can be assumed from differences in marital status. Being unemployed and married is strongly associated with poorer mental health for male.

Model 3 includes all the control variables. There is not a relationship between gender and mental health. Marital status and the interaction between marital status and gender, becomes insignificant. This is due to the role of age and economic situation and this would put forward that the better

mental health among female is related to the differential positions and roles of male and female.

VIII. DISCUSSION

This is a research area provide inconclusive outcomes of the connection between unemployment, gender and mental wellbeing with respect to the current era although it is present in classic unemployment research. Existing theories and related literature shows that, impact of unemployment on mental health is differ for males and females due to the different positions and roles that are available for men and women in society and the family. In addition to that these findings ascertain that these differences are not fixed and vary between

environments. Thus the relationship between unemployment, gender and mental health can vary over time in one country to another country with respect to different gender relations.

Historicity most Sri Lankan women engaged in household works and it could see low female labour force participation. Thus for Sri Lankan context fits the classic theoretical assumptions of a differential need for employment between male and female. That means, unemployment has a stronger negative connection with mental health among male than female. Meanwhile, unemployed females were found to have low levels of psychological distress than males. But this result is disappeared when controlled for marital status. Marriage case to increased psychological distress among unemployed men but not unemployed women

Factors influencing to family and economic situation directly describe the full or part of the dissimilarity in mental health between unemployed male and female. The expected differences between males and females were related to differences in economic and psychosocial need of employment and these differences were related to the different structural positions of males and females have to act in their family and economic situation.

Finally, it could conclude that contextual situation affect for the relationship between unemployment, gender and mental health. At the same time, roles and positions of the labour market and in the family creates gendered differences in the relationship between unemployment and mental health.

In the male breadwinner system female engagement in housework is encouraged, and women will tend to have both a lower psychosocial and an economic need of employment than men.

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