

Unemployment and crime — what is the connection? James O. Wilson and Philip J. Cook, The Public Interest, Spring 85.

Health Syndrome of Unemployment, Worklife, Vol. 4, No. 3, 1985.

How Unemployment Affects People, Martyn Harris, New Society, January 19, 1984.

Unemployment and Social Problems in the Past, Social Indicators Research, Volume 15, No. 4, November 1984.

Social Impact of Unemployment, Harry MacKay, Perception, Spring-Summer 1983.

Warning: Unemployment May Be Hazardous to your Health, Ronald Labonte, Perception, Vol. 7, No. 5.

Unemployment: Canada's Malignant Social Pathology, Richard Deaton, Perception, Spring-Summer 1983.

The Burden of Unemployment in Canada, R. Paul Shaw, Canadian Public Policy, 1985.

Note: Many of the authors reviewed maintain there is a scientific causal relationship between unemployment and certain social problems (suicide, homicide, alcoholism and so on); however, they have not been able to produce incontrovertible proof. Those who doubt that, for example, unemployment causes disease, point out there is no way to prove which caused what: does a person become sick because he or she is unemployed or is that person unemployed because of a tendency to be sick?

Social costs of unemployment

(1) There is a measurable causal link and cost between unemployment and mortality, suicide, family breakdown, alcoholism, violent crime, juvenile delinquency, cardiovascular disease and mental hospital and prison admissions (Deaton, 1984), (Brenner).

(2) Stress is the single biggest health threat facing the unemployed causing several physical changes: altered rates of metabolism; elevated blood pressure, pulse rate and blood supply to cardiac muscles;

increase in blood levels of cholesterol and fatty acids; increase in blood sugar and stomach acids all leading to heart disease, strokes, ulcers and several other illnesses including cancer.

(3) Canadian, American and British data suggest that the poor die younger, are more malnourished and suffer a higher incidence of disease (Labonte, 1983). If unemployed people are poorer due to a decrease in income, it follows that they are also less healthy (Wilkins and Adams, 1983).

Mortality

(4) Eyer argues that the rise in mortality is not due to unemployment as Brenner* suggests but, rather, to re-employment and capital expansion: new and dangerous technology, faster work pace, forced overtime, increased mobility, social stress to use health-threatening drugs and alcohol. Cyclical unemployment accounts for a very small increase in mortality.

(5) In times of high unemployment, those who are employed, re-employed or re-trained to deal with new technologies are often exploited by employers who can lower wages and deregulate the workplace more easily. Therefore, the views of Eyer and Brenner are not totally irreconcilable.

(6) Eyer acknowledges that the long-term (six months plus) unemployed face greater health risks.

Unemployment and Crime

(7) Many claim that economic adversity causes an increase in crime rates (theft, homicide, crime against property).

(8) A rise in unemployment may lead some people to steal because of a lack of jobs.

(9) This rise may also cause people to be more protective of property and cash, as well as a reduction in the supply of new cars, T.V.s, etc. to be stolen.

(10) The relationship between unemployment and violent crime is unclear as hard times often cause people to become more subdued and to "pull together" rather than to strike out aggressively.

(11) In the U.S. from 1945-1973, as unemployment rose, the homicide rate decreased.

*Note: Harvey Brenner of Johns Hopkins University is a well-known appraiser of the social costs of unemployment in the U.S.