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**THE EFFECTS OF PARENTAL JOB DISPLACEMENT ON CHILDREN'S SOCIOECONOMIC AND
SOCIAL-PSYCHOLOGICAL OUTCOMES**

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Abstract

The effects of parental job displacement on the lives of American children have seldom been more relevant than in the current era of massive economic upheaval. Despite a large body of research associating job displacement with subsequent non-employment, earnings losses, job quality declines, poor physical and mental health, family disruption, and social withdrawal, the effects of parental job displacement on children's well-being is scarce. Using data from the Panel Study of Income Dynamics and the Child Development Supplement, we examine the effects of parental job displacement and associated family socioeconomic upheaval on children's subsequent socioeconomic and social-psychological outcomes.

Extended Abstract

The effects of parental job displacement on the lives of American children have seldom been more relevant than in the current era of economic upheaval. One in seven children in the U.S. under the age of 18, or 10.5 million children, had an unemployed parent in the first quarter of 2010 (Lovell and Isaacs 2010). This number is nearly double the number of children who had an unemployed parent at the end of 2007, before the "Great Recession." An even larger number of children had a parent who experienced a job displacement, a form of involuntary job loss that occurs when firms downsize, restructure, close plants or relocate. Despite a large body of research associating job displacement with subsequent non-employment, earnings losses, job quality declines, and poor physical and mental health, the effects of displacement on children's well-being is relatively scarce. Thus, while we know that job displacement can be socioeconomically, psychologically, physically, and socially damaging among the displaced workers themselves, we know less about whether and to what extent displacement is damaging to the children of displaced workers. The study of job displacement provides a unique opportunity to study how socioeconomic hardship affects the development and well being of children. In this paper, we examine the effects of parental job displacement and associated socioeconomic upheaval of families on children's subsequent socioeconomic and social-psychological outcomes.

Incidence of Job Displacement

Recent periods of economic reorganization in the U.S. have been associated with widespread job insecurity, waves of job displacement, and the disappearance of a lifetime job with a single employer for growing segments of the workforce (Farley 1996; Kalleberg 2000, 2009; Levy 1995; Wetzel 1995). While there were large employment gains in the economic recovery of the 1980s, newly created jobs were in general of a lower quality than jobs from which workers had been displaced. The economic recovery of the 1980s was unlike previous economic expansions as the benefits were not equally distributed across the income distribution; unemployment persisted at a relatively high rate, average earnings of men stagnated and increased moderately for women, there was no growth in the middle class, no change in the proportion of people in poverty, and there was an increase in income inequality, including an increase in income inequality among families with children (Western, Bloome, and Percheski 2008). Job loss continued throughout the 1990s and early 2000s as economic retrenchment and corporate restructuring continued. The result was even more job insecurity, accompanied by waves of downsizing, reorganization, mergers and takeovers, technological displacement, and job outsourcing to foreign workers. There was a growing public perception that the structure of job displacement qualitatively changed, that highly skilled white collar and educated workers with more tenure were increasingly vulnerable to job loss, reductions in earnings, and prolonged unemployment (Farber 1993).

The period since 2008 to the present is now called the "Great Recession." It is considered by many economists to be the worst financial crisis since the Great Depression of the 1930s. The recession is both deep and broad. The U.S. unemployment rate hovered around 10 percent over the last several quarters, the highest rate since 1983 and roughly twice the pre-recession rate. The average hours per workweek also declined to 33, the lowest level since the government began collecting the data in 1964. The percentage of families with an unemployed member was 6.3 percent in 2007; it rose to 7.8 percent in 2008 and to 12.0 percent in 2009. This figure translates to 9.4 million families with at least one unemployed member in 2009, up from 6.1 million in 2008. Scholars using simulations estimate that the number of children growing up in poverty may increase by 5 million over the next few years as a result of the recession (Monea and Sawhill

2009).¹ Unlike the last two recessions — earlier this decade and in the early 1990s — the Great Recession has caused significantly more job loss among the less educated than among college graduates. The majority of the layoffs in this recession have fallen on construction workers, hotel workers, retail workers, and others without a college degree. It has impacted Latinos more than any other ethnic group.

Effects of Job Displacement

Given that the incidence of job loss due to lay-offs, downsizing, and plant closings has increased and the availability of good jobs to replace lost jobs has been limited, it is hardly surprising that the period since the late 1980s witnessed the emergence of a growing body of research on the effects of job displacement. What is surprising is that very little of that work has focused on the effects of job displacement on children.

Job displacement is associated with substantial career losses. Most estimates indicate that the average displaced worker experiences a long period of non-employment (Brand 2004; Fallick 1996; Farber 2005; Kletzer 1998; Podgursky and Swaim 1987; Ruhm 1991; Topel 1990), a period that lasts longer during recessions than expansions (Farber 1993; Kletzer 1998, 1991). The length of non-employment has a high degree of variance (Seitchik 1991). While some displaced workers are able to replace jobs relatively quickly, others are "permanently displaced" or "structurally unemployed" (Seitchik 1991). The impact of job displacement on careers has been found to be considerable even when workers do not experience long-term or chronic unemployment. Displaced workers suffer substantial earnings losses, which are generally more persistent than non-employment effects. Earnings losses for displaced workers have been estimated to be between 10 and 25 percent, with wage scarring observed as long as ten years after the displacement event occurs (Brand 2004; Chan and Stevens 2001; Couch 1998; Fallick 1996; Farber 2005; Jacobson, LaLonde, and Sullivan 1993; Kletzer 1998; Podgursky and Swaim 1987; Ruhm 1991; Seitchik 1991; Topel 1990). As is true for non-employment effects, the degree to which displaced workers suffer earnings and wage losses is cyclical (Kletzer 1991; Topel 1990) and has a high degree of variance (Brand 2004; Seitchik 1991). In a recession like the current one, it is likely that the displaced workers are facing longer periods of unemployment and more severe earnings losses.

Beyond economic losses, displaced workers may find, when reemployed, that their jobs are of lower quality, in terms of job authority, autonomy, and employer-offered benefits, in comparison to both the jobs they lost and the jobs held by their non-displaced counterparts (Brand 2004, 2006). Displaced workers are, assuming they want to be reemployed, forced to search for a new job, disproportionately in periods of economic downturn. Displaced workers experience lower job benefits on reemployed jobs partly as a result of the loss of a high quality match between the worker and the job (Fallick 1996).

Job displacement is a negative, often unpredictable, life event that entails a sequence of stressful experiences, from job loss notification, anticipation, dismissal, and unemployment, to (in most cases) job search, re-training and eventual reemployment. Initial movement into unemployment is associated with a number of pressures: reduced income, loss of health and pension benefits, and interruption of asset accrual; new patterns of interaction with family members; restriction of socially-supportive collegial relationships; and personal assessment in relation to individual values and societal norms (Pearlin et al. 1981). It is therefore not surprising that a significant association has been found between job displacement and psychological distress and depression (Brand, Levy, and Gallo 2008; Burgard, Brand and House 2007; Dooley and

¹ This number was estimated by combining the monthly unemployment statistics with data on the family status of unemployed men and women from the Annual Social and Economic Supplement to the Current Population Survey.

Catalano 1999; Dooley, Catalano, and Wilson 1994; Dooley, Fielding and Levi 1996; Gallo et al. 2000; Gallo et al. 2006; Jahoda 1982; Kasl and Jones 2000; Kessler, Turner and House 1989; Leana and Feldman 1992; Pearlin et al. 1981; Turner 1995; Warr and Jackson 1985).

Job displacement is also associated with disruption of social and family structures and ties. Displaced workers have significant and long-term lower probabilities of involvement in various modes of social participation (Brand and Burgard 2008; Wilensky 1961), and they are also more likely to be divorced (Charles and Stephens 2004), and, plausibly in search of a new job, to be geographically mobile (Oreopoulos, Page, and Stevens 2008). When such shocks occur to parents, they may negatively impact children.

A few very recent studies, some of which are still in working paper form, assess the impact of parental job displacement on children's outcomes (Coelli 2009; Kalil and Ziol-Guest 2008; Linden 2009; Oreopoulos, Page, and Stevens 2008; Page, Stevens, and Lindo 2009; Rege et al. 2009). Some of these studies are not framed as studies of the effects of parental job displacement on children's outcomes per se, but rather as a way of isolating some other process of interest, such as the intergenerational income correlation. Still, the few recent studies that have examined the effects on the children of displaced workers have suggested some immediate and long-term impacts on children's academic progress, educational attainment, and earnings as adults.

Conceptual Framework

An extensive literature, from Blau and Duncan (1967) to a large literature in sociology and economics [see Solon (1999) for a review], demonstrates the substantial impact of family socioeconomic status on children's life outcomes. Job displacement is the result of conditions that are largely beyond the control of parents, but threatens the security of long-term employment and hinders parents' ability to sustain a successful career characterized by upward socioeconomic mobility. The study of parental job displacement adds insight to studies of social stratification and intergenerational mobility by providing a way of understanding how structured opportunity contexts and parental attainment processes interact and affect the transmission of socioeconomic status to the next generation.

The consequences of job displacement operate as potential mechanisms linking the job loss of parents to the outcomes of children. First, job displacement is associated with downward socioeconomic mobility. Insufficient or unstable work also limits families' socioeconomic resources to purchase goods critical for child development, such as schools, housing, food, and safe and cognitively enriched learning environments (Conger and Elder 1994; Duncan and Brooks-Gunn 1997; Kalil and Ziol-Guest 2008)). Socioeconomic decline may also dampen children's own attitudes about the value of work. Periods of unemployment may allow more time to spend with children raising children's attainment; however, more likely, the stress associated with employment uncertainty and the time needed to devote to job search will reduce the quantity and quality of time spent with children. Second, job displacement is associated with declines in psychological and physical well-being, and parents with lower levels of psychological well-being and worse physical health have children with more disadvantaged life trajectories. Lower levels of physical and psychological well-being can inhibit emotional warmth and increase parents' disengaged or erratic behavior (Kessler et al. 1989), which can lead to poor adjustment in children (Elder, Nguyen, and Caspi 1985). Third, job displacement is associated with declines in social participation and social interaction, and children who lack social capital and collective efficacy in neighborhoods can have worse educational and socioeconomic outcomes (Coleman 1988, 1990; Furstenberg et al. 1999; Leventhal and Brooks-Gunn 2000; Sampson, Raudenbush, and Earls 1997; Sampson, Morenoff, and Earls 1999; Sandefur and Lauman 1998). Fourth, job displacement is associated with marital dissolution. A large literature links family discord and parental divorce to worse child socioeconomic and social-psychological outcomes (McLanahan and Sandefur 1994; for a meta-analysis see Amato and Keith 1991). Fifth, job displacement is associated with residential

and geographic mobility. Moving can be stressful for children, particularly if it involves changing schools and making new friends, and several studies link geographic mobility of children to worse outcomes (Astone and McLanahan 1994; Haveman et al. 1991; McLanahan 1983), or at least the change in neighborhood characteristics often associated with geographic change (Jackson and Mare 2009). Job loss is also associated with home loss, sometime by mortgage default and foreclosure, creating stress beyond just geographically relocating in search of a new job. In the current era of economic upheaval, job loss and home loss are intricately linked.²

There are also several possible moderating factors in the relationship between parental job displacement and children's outcomes. First, the macroeconomic context may moderate the effects. There are likely to be differences between losing a job during a period of economic stability or growth, and during a period of economic upheaval. The macroeconomic context is a principal factor determining how effective displaced parents are in their search for reemployment. Conversely, in periods of widespread unemployment, the social stigma associated with job loss may be lessened. The effect of job displacement on children may differ depending upon the period in which parents are displaced, and whether the economic or the social consequences of job displacement are more important to children's well-being. Second, family socioeconomic status and family structure may moderate the effect of a parental job displacement on children's outcomes. An income shock may be more damaging to those families with initially low human capital and socioeconomic resources, and thus their ability to "weather the storm" and to secure comparable reemployment. Third, the age of the child at the time of the parental job displacement may moderate the effects. Stressful life events can shape the neurobiology of children of different critical ages leading to different socioeconomic and social-psychological outcomes as adults.

Research Objectives

This paper is an effort to understand the effects of parental job displacement and associated socioeconomic, psychological, and social changes in families on children's socioeconomic and social-psychological outcomes in the United States. Despite an extensive literature on the effects of job displacement on the outcomes of displaced workers, much less attention has been paid to the effects of job displacement on the children of displaced workers. The recent studies that have begun to examine the effects on children are yielding important results yet leave room for more thorough investigation of the effects. This paper will examine the effects of parental job displacement on children's academic attainment and psychological well-being and social involvement.

For each of these outcomes, we explore the mechanisms discussed above. Recent studies examining the link between job displacement and children's outcomes have not paid much attention to the potential mediating effect of parental job characteristics other than earnings, or to psychological and physical health changes, or to social withdrawal. We will also explore the differences in effects between economic recessions and expansions on children's well-being.

We use data from the Panel Study of Income Dynamics (PSID) from the 1968-current waves and the PSID Child Development Supplement (CDS) from 1997-current waves to follow parents and their children over time. The PSID is a nationally representative longitudinal study of nearly 9,000 U.S. families. The PSID collects data on economic, health, and social behavior of respondents. Many prior studies of job displacement have used PSID data. The CDS focuses on the children and caregivers within PSID families, collecting information on education, health, cognitive, and behavioral development, and time use.

² The delinquency rate for mortgage loans on one-to-four-unit residential properties increased to a seasonally adjusted rate of 10 percent of all loans outstanding as of the end of the first quarter of 2010, an increase from the fourth quarter of 2009 according to the Mortgage Bankers Association's National Delinquency Survey.

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