



ASA NEWS

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Job Authority Increases Depression Symptoms in Women, Decreases Them in Men

WASHINGTON, DC, November 17, 2014 — A new study finds that having job authority increases symptoms of depression among women, but decreases them among men.

“Women with job authority — the ability to hire, fire, and influence pay — have significantly more symptoms of depression than women without this power,” said Tetyana Pudrovskaya, an assistant professor in the Department of Sociology at the University of Texas at Austin and the lead author of the study. “In contrast, men with job authority have fewer symptoms of depression than men without such power.”

Titled, “Gender, Job Authority, and Depression,” the study, which appears in the December issue of the *Journal of Health and Social Behavior*, considers more than 1,300 middle-aged men and 1,500 middle-aged women, who graduated from high schools in Wisconsin.

According to Pudrovskaya, who co-authored the study with Amelia Karraker, an assistant professor in the Department of Human Development and Family Studies at Iowa State University, women without job authority exhibit slightly more symptoms of depression on average than men without job authority. But among people with the ability to hire, fire, and influence pay, women typically exhibit many more symptoms of depression than men.

“What’s striking is that women with job authority in our study are advantaged in terms of most characteristics that are strong predictors of positive mental health,” said Pudrovskaya. “These women have more education, higher incomes, more prestigious occupations, and higher levels of job satisfaction and autonomy than women without job authority. Yet, they have worse mental health than lower-status women.”

So why does having job authority increase symptoms of depression in women, but decrease them in men?

“Years of social science research suggests that women in authority positions deal with interpersonal tension, negative social interactions, negative stereotypes, prejudice, social isolation, as well as resistance from subordinates, colleagues, and superiors,” Pudrovskaya said. “Women in authority positions are viewed as lacking the assertiveness and confidence of strong leaders. But when these women display such characteristics, they are judged negatively for being unfeminine. This contributes to chronic stress.”

On the other hand, Pudrovskaya said men in authority positions generally deal with fewer stressors because they do not have to overcome the resistance and negative stereotypes that women often face. “Men in positions of authority are consistent with the expected status beliefs, and male leadership is accepted as normative and legitimate,” she said. “This increases men’s power and effectiveness as leaders and diminishes interpersonal conflict.”

In terms of the study’s policy implications, Pudrovskaya said the findings indicate that “we need to address gender discrimination, hostility, and prejudice against women leaders to reduce the psychological costs and increase the psychological rewards of higher-status jobs for women.”

The study was supported by funding from the National Institutes of Health’s National Institute on Aging.

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About the American Sociological Association and the *Journal of Health and Social Behavior*

The American Sociological Association (www.asanet.org), founded in 1905, is a non-profit membership association dedicated to serving sociologists in their work, advancing sociology as a science and profession, and promoting the contributions to and use of sociology by society. The *Journal of Health and Social Behavior* is a quarterly, peer-reviewed journal of the ASA.

The research article described above is available by request for members of the media. For a copy of the full study, contact Daniel Fowler, ASA Media Relations Manager, at (202) 527-7885 or pubinfo@asanet.org.