



Relational conflicts during COVID-19: impact of loss and reduction of employment due to preventive measures and the influence of sex and stress (in the iCARE study)



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INTRODUCTION

- Increases in relational conflicts during COVID-19 because of job losses, financial strain, elevated stress levels, and social isolation; consequences of health authorities' preventive measures¹⁻⁴
- More impacts on females due to heightened responsibilities (school and daycare closures) and employment in sectors such as services and healthcare⁴
- Impact on rates of domestic violence due to periods of confinement and job losses among female⁵

Objectives :

Determine if loss or reduction of employment was associated with an increase in relational conflicts (physical and verbal fights) and the extent to which this relationship was influenced by participants' sex and by COVID-19-related stress levels

METHODS

Participants and procedure

- International COVID-19 Awareness and Responses Evaluation (iCARE) Study (www.icarestudy.com)
- 3 rounds of Canadian representative sample (between October 29, 2020, and March 23, 2021)
- Participants included (N=5,103) based on their reported employment status before the COVID-19 pandemic (part-time, full-time and self-employed)

Measures

iCARE survey: 57 questions, 20 minutes

Impact module: "Please indicate the impact that COVID-19 has had on the following aspects of your life in the past month"

- Relational conflicts:** I had more physical and verbal altercations with family members I live with
- Loss/reduction of employment:** I lost my job or had to close my business and I saw a reduction in working hours/lost income
- COVID-19-related stress:** I have felt nervous, anxious or worried, I have felt sad, depressed or hopeless and I have felt irritable, frustrated or angry

Scale: not at all, very little, somewhat, strongly

Logistic regression analyses

- Main effect model: loss/reduction of employment (IV) and relational conflicts (VD)
- Second model: sex x loss/reduction of employment (+ disaggregated analyses)
- Identical model explored associations between COVID-19-related stress and relational conflicts

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RESULTS



Participants with loss/reduction of employment were **3.6** times more likely to report increased relational conflicts compared to those with stable employment (OR=3.60; 95% CIs=3.03-4.26)



There was a significant interaction between employment status and sex ($\chi^2=10.16$; $p<.005$) :

- Males reporting loss/reduction of employment were **5.2** times more likely to report relational conflicts (OR = 5.22; 95% CIs: 4.09-6.67)
- Females experiencing loss/reduction of employment were **2.4** times more likely to report relational conflicts (OR = 2.38; 95% CIs: 1.87-3.03)



There was a significant main effect of COVID-19-related stress on relational conflicts :

- Participants reporting higher levels of stress were **10** times more likely to report relational conflicts (OR = 9.54; 95% CIs: 6.70-13.60)
- No interaction between COVID-19-related stress and loss/reduction of employment on relational conflicts was observed ($\chi^2=0.46$, $p=0.50$)

DISCUSSION

Loss/reduction of employment was associated with increased relational conflicts

- Financial problems (stress spillover) and psychological distress (anxiety and depressive disorders)⁶⁻⁷

Loss/reduction of employment impacted males more than females

- More stigma, decreased self-esteem, and depressive symptom among males⁸
- Theories of male backlash and instrumental violence⁹

COVID-19-related stress was associated with more relational conflicts (independent of job status)

- Vulnerability-stress-adaptation model¹

CONCLUSION

Results highlight:

- ✓ The importance of developing targeted prevention programs to assist families in better managing the impacts of loss/reduction of employment, particularly among males, in the event confinement measures are reinstated due to the emergence of new COVID-19 variants or future pandemics
- ✓ A deeper understanding of the psychosocial repercussions and gender disparities related to public health emergencies



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