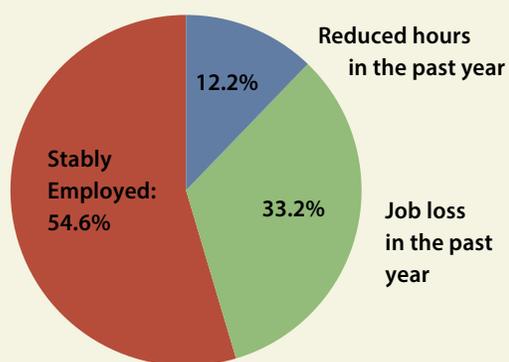


# Baltimore Mothers' Stable Employment Promotes Child and Family Health

> **The Great Recession resulted in job loss and reduced work hours for many Americans; many jobs are yet to be replaced. In 2012, Marylanders experienced a 7% unemployment rate and a 12.6% underemployment rate<sup>a,1</sup>. Children's HealthWatch research in Baltimore shows that unemployment (job loss) and under-employment (reduced work hours) of mothers place low-income young children (ages 0-4 years) and their mothers at risk of poor physical and mental health, and of being unable to afford basic needs like food and housing.**



Source: Children's HealthWatch, 2012.

Among a sample of more than 2,300 mothers with young children interviewed between 2002 and 2012 at U of MD Medical Center, almost half of mothers (45.4%) reported job loss or reduced work hours during the past year for reasons unrelated to pregnancy or childbirth. Market conditions (including layoffs, employer bankruptcy and slow business) were the leading cause of job loss or reduced hours among Baltimore mothers.

> **Job loss has health consequences for Baltimore mothers and children**

Compared to young children whose mothers were stably employed, children whose mothers had lost a job in the past year were 24% less likely

to meet well-child criteria: not overweight or underweight, and with parents reporting that he/she is in good health, developing normally for age, and has never been hospitalized.

Compared to stably employed mothers, mothers who had lost a job in the past year were:

- 39% more likely to report being in fair or poor health
- 45% more likely to have experienced depressive symptoms

Poor maternal mental health has been linked to delayed development in young children, compounding the negative impacts of job loss on children.<sup>2</sup>

These families were also more likely to struggle to afford basic needs, such as food, housing and utilities. When compared to families in which the mother was stably employed, families in which the mother had experienced job loss in the past year faced significantly increased rates of hardship and were:

- 66% more likely to be food insecure
- 41% more likely to be housing insecure
- 31% more likely to be energy insecure

Prior Children's HealthWatch research indicates children experiencing one or more of these household hardships are more likely to be hospitalized, developmentally delayed, and generally in poorer health.<sup>3-6</sup>

<sup>a</sup>The underemployment rate cited here is defined as total unemployed, plus all marginally attached workers, plus total employed part time for economic reasons, as a percent of the civilian labor force plus all marginally attached workers - See more at: <http://www.americashealthrankings.org/MD/Underemployed/2012#sthash.pivP9H1k.dpuf>

## Summary of Findings

When compared to Baltimore mothers who have experienced job loss or reduced work hours in the past year:

1. Young children of stably employed Baltimore mothers are more likely to score well on assessments of physical and mental health.
2. Stably employed Baltimore mothers are in better mental and physical health.
3. Stably employed Baltimore mothers are more likely to be able to afford utilities, housing, and enough food.

Our research shows the positive effects of stable, maternal employment for children. We can preserve these effects by:

- Protecting low-wage workers from policies that incentivize employers to cut hours
- Improving access to affordable, quality childcare
- Providing universal paid sick leave
- Supporting job training and degree programs that lead to stable employment



[www.childrenshealthwatch.org](http://www.childrenshealthwatch.org)

*A non-partisan pediatric research center that monitors the impact of public policies and economic conditions on the health of low-income young children.*

**“What would you do if you were in my shoes? If you had to work two jobs to take care of your kids and it still wasn’t enough?”**

Imani S., Witness to Hunger

Among mothers who avoided job loss, many experienced a reduction in work hours. Children’s HealthWatch data illustrate the impact reduced employment hours may have on health. When compared to the families of stably employed mothers, families with mothers who reported reduced work hours in the past year were:

- More than twice as likely to report household food insecurity
- Nearly twice as likely to experience depressive symptoms

As pediatric researchers, we believe steps to protect, support, and better train low-wage workers, can reduce the rate, and health and economic impacts of job loss and reduced work hours on children and families:

**> Reducing the rate of job loss and reduced work hours**

- Supporting universal paid sick leave would help parents balance employment and care for their children.
- Making employers, employees and the uninsured aware of opportunities for free or subsidized health coverage available through the Affordable Care Act will reduce incentives to limit hours.
- Increasing funding to reduce, and ideally eliminate, waiting lists for high-quality, affordable childcare programs for low-income mothers would support maternal full-time employment and education.
- Supporting work-study, internship, and vocational training programs through community colleges and similar institutions to effectively train low-income mothers would prepare them for more stable and better compensated employment.

**> Reducing the negative impacts of job loss and reduced work hours**

- Asking in healthcare settings about changes in maternal employment status, including reduced work hours, would help identify and target services to children at medical and developmental risk—and mothers with increased risk of poor health and depressive symptoms.
- Extending unemployment insurance would assist those facing extreme difficulty finding employment.
- Increasing access to unemployment benefits and other supports for low-wage workers who face job loss or reduced work hours and would otherwise not be eligible.

**The stabilizing effects of employment are felt not only by workers and not only in immediate financial terms. When mothers are stably employed, young children are healthier and better able to learn and grow. As the economy recovers, Maryland’s policy makers should take steps to help low-income mothers train for and retain stable employment. As today’s leaders, we are responsible for ensuring a healthy future for the state’s children: the leaders of tomorrow.**

**A stably employed mother** is one who is working and has neither experienced job loss nor reduced work hours in the past year.

Families experience **food insecurity** when they lack access to sufficient food for all family members to lead active, healthy lives.

Families are considered **housing insecure** if ANY of the following applied in the past year: the family

- Moved frequently (two or more times)
- Was in a crowded housing situation
- Was behind on rent at any point

Families are considered **energy insecure** if they experienced ANY of the following in the past year:

- A threatened or actual utility shut-off
- An unheated or uncooled day because of inability to pay utility bills
- Use of a cooking stove as a source of heat

<sup>1</sup>United Health Foundation, (2013). America’s health rankings® — 2012 edition. Accessed June 11, 2013. Retrieved from <http://www.americashealthrankings.org/rankings>

<sup>2</sup>Kiernan, K. E., & Huerta, M. C. (2008). Economic deprivation, maternal depression, parenting and children’s cognitive and emotional development in early childhood. *The British Journal of Sociology*, 59(4), 783-806.

<sup>3</sup>Ettinger de Cuba, S., Weiss, I., Pasquariello, J., Schiffmiller, A., Frank, D. A., Coleman, S., ... Cook, J. Children’s HealthWatch, (2012). The SNAP vaccine: Boosting children’s health.

<sup>4</sup>Cutts, D. B., Meyers, A. F., Black, M. M., Casey, P. H., Chilton, M., Cook, J. T., ... Frank, D. A. (2011). US housing insecurity and the health of very young children. *Am J Public Health*, 101(8), 1508-1514.

<sup>5</sup>Cook, J. T., Frank, D. A., Casey, P. H., Rose-Jacobs, R., Black, M. M., Chilton, M., ... Cutts, D. B. (2008). A brief indicator of household energy security: Associations with food security, child health, and child development in US infants and toddlers. *Pediatrics*, 122(4), e867-e875.

<sup>6</sup>Frank, D. A., Casey, P. H., Black, M. M., Rose-Jacobs, R., Chilton, M., Cutts, D., ... Cook, J. T. (2010). Cumulative hardship and wellness of low-income, young children: Multisite surveillance study. *Pediatrics*, 125(5), e1115-e1123.

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