

# The Great Recession, Health and Well-being in the Midlife in the U.S. Study: Longitudinal Data from Main and Milwaukee Samples

Julie A. Kirsch & Carol D. Ryff

## Summary

**Background:** The 2008 Great Recession is regarded as the severest economic crisis in recent history, and is projected to have long-term consequences on health and well-being.<sup>1</sup> Milwaukee, part of the manufacturing belt, was disproportionately impacted by employment loss and the housing crisis compared to other major cities. The Great Recession also worsened existing race/ethnic disparities in home ownership and employment. Though the economic consequences of the Great Recession are clear, less is known about the long-term impacts on health and well-being, especially in harder hit geographical regions, like Milwaukee.

**Research Aims.** We tested pre- to post-recession changes in financial and psychological well-being, and physical health in both a nationally representative sample and a sample of African American adults from Milwaukee. Degree of recession hardship (e.g., home loss, job loss) was compared across the two samples. We tested recession hardship as a predictor of changes in outcomes.

**Method:** Participants were from MIDUS (Midlife in the U.S. study). The main sample was a nationally representative of adults (age 35-85) who completed pre-recession (2005) and post-recession measures (2014; N=1091). The Milwaukee sample was African American adults who completed pre-recession (2006) and post-recession measures (2016). Linear regression models tested pre- to post-recession changes in financial, psychological, and physical outcomes (See Table 2 for list of measures).

**Results/conclusion:** The Milwaukee sample reported more recession hardships than the main sample. Financial and psychological well-being declined from pre- to post-recession in both samples. Physical health problems increased in both samples. Those who experienced more recession hardships showed larger increases in physical health problems. In summary, exposure to recession hardships may accelerate age-related changes in physical health. Recession hardships did not predict changes in psychological well-being. Future research should include more nuanced indicators of physical health, such as health behaviors and biological indicators. Differences by age and gender should also be considered.

## Study Aims

- 1) To compare experiences of recession hardship in Milwaukee to a national sample of adults.
- 2) To investigate pre- to post-recession changes in financial, psychological, and physical well-being.
- 3) To test recession hardship exposure as predictor of changes in well-being and health.

## Method

Table 1: Study Samples

MIDUS Main Sample		African Am. Milwaukee Sample	
Pre-Recession	Post-Recession	Pre-Recession	Post-Recession
Year: 2004-2006 N= 1805	Year: 2013-2015 N=1091	Year: 2005-2007 N= 416	Year: 2016-2017 N=262
Age: 35-85	Age: 45-95	Age: 35-85	Age: 45-95
54.7% Female	54.3% Female	64.7% Female	67.6% Female
36.9% College Ed.	41.9% College Ed.	14.2% College Ed.	12.9% College Ed.
73.3% Married/ Cohab.	67.8% Married/ Cohab.	35.3% Married/ Cohab.	31.3 Married/ Cohab.
35.8% Own Home	44.8% Own Home	7.3% Own Home	10.4 % Own Home
89.4% White	89.2% White		

## Method Continued

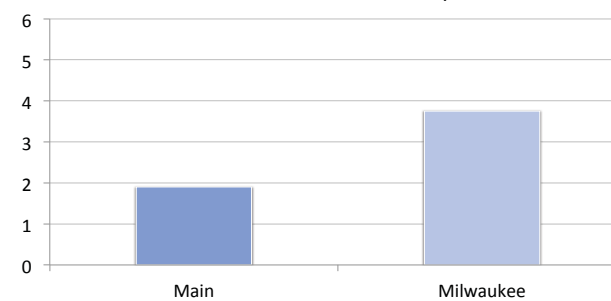
Table 2: Measures

Predictor Variable	Description
Recession Hardship	Sum of 18 negative recession events (e.g., job loss, home loss)
<b>Outcome Variables</b>	
<u>Financial Well-Being</u>	
Financial Control	Single item, rated from 1=Low, to 10=High
Financial Satisfaction	Single item, rated from 1=Low, to 10=High
<u>Psychological Well-Being</u>	
Purpose in Life	Composite measure of 7 items, range =7-49
Sense of Control	Composite measure of 5 items, range = 1-7
<u>Physical Well-Being</u>	
Total Chronic Conditions	Sum of chronic health problems (range = 0-16)
Waist Circumference	Measured in inches (range = 19-80 inches)
Functional Limitations	Sum of limitations (e.g., walking, lifting, carrying; range = 0-21)

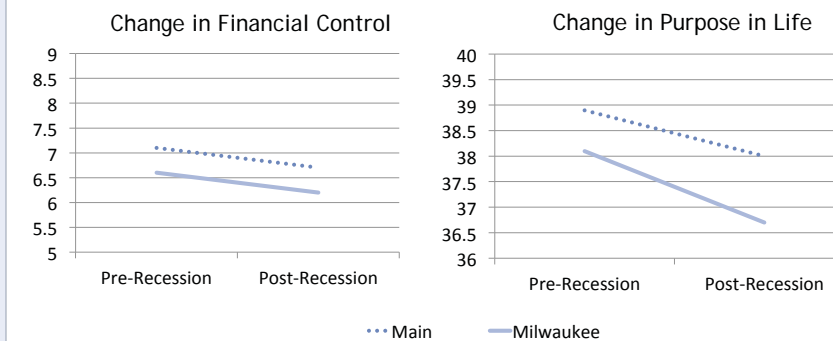
## Results

**Aim 1 Results:** Milwaukee sample experienced more recession-related hardships than the Main longitudinal sample

Total Recession-Related Hardships In MIDUS Main and Milwaukee Samples

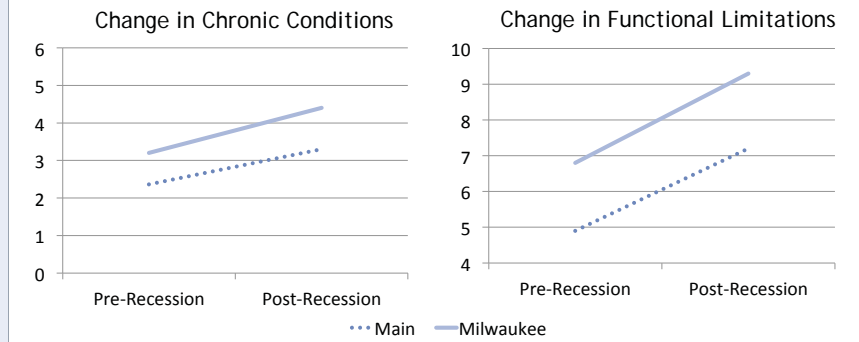


**Aim 2 Results:** Financial and psychological well-being declined pre- to post-recession in both Main and Milwaukee samples



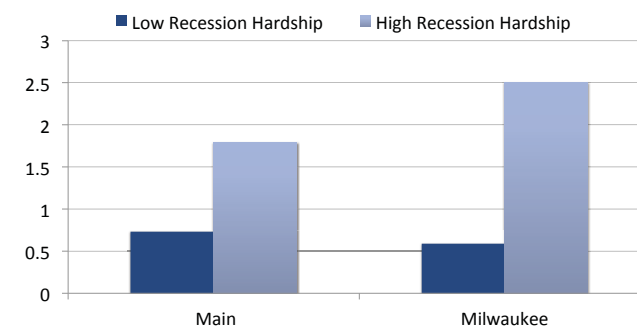
## Results

**Aim 2 Results:** Physical health problems increased from pre- to post-recession in both Main and Milwaukee samples



**Aim 3 Results:** Exposure to more recession hardships predicted larger increases in chronic conditions and functional limitations.

Change in Chronic Conditions by Low and High Recession Hardship



## Conclusions

- ◆ African Americans from Milwaukee experienced more recession-related hardships (e.g., job loss, housing loss, increased debt) compared to the main sample.
- ◆ Financial and psychological well-being and physical health worsened from pre- to post-recession in both samples.
  - ◆ Those who experienced more recession hardships showed larger increases in physical health problems (chronic conditions and functional limitations).
  - ◆ Recession hardships did not influence changes in financial or psychological well-being
- ◆ These findings have relevance for the development of economic and health policies geared towards vulnerable individuals.
- ◆ Future work needs to track the longitudinal impact of recession hardships on biological indicators and to examine risk and protective factors related to recession hardship and health.

### References

1. Burgard, S. A., Ailshire, J. A., & Kalousova, L. (2013) The Great Recession and health: People, populations, and disparities. *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, 650, 194-213.

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