

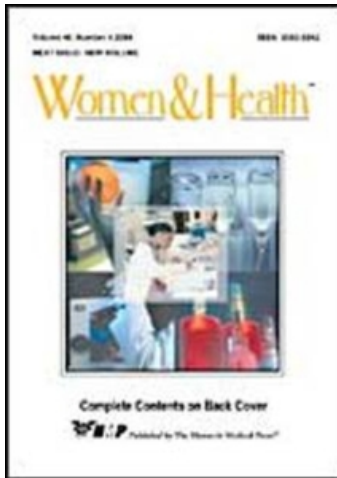
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Recurrent Job Loss and Mental Health Among Women

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Growing instability in the labor market has led to an increase in recurrent job loss, which primarily affects women (Tamir, 2007). Numerous studies have shown that job loss is a stressful, traumatic experience that has consequences for the individuals who are laid off. However, few studies have examined how recurrent job loss affects individuals. The present study of 134 Israeli women aged 30–45 years aimed to examine how recurrent job loss affected individual women's perceptions of the event and the extent to which it generated emotional stress and psychiatric symptoms. Most of the women perceived job loss as a challenging event and their assessments of job loss had a stronger impact on the development of mental health consequences than did the number of times they had actually been laid off. The more the women perceived job loss as threatening, the more they reported emotional stress and psychiatric symptoms. Conversely, the more they perceived job loss as challenging, the lower their levels of emotional stress. Never-married women were laid-off more, and they reported more mental health symptoms following recurrent job loss than did married women. The findings suggest that perception of job loss as a threatening event might cause mental health problems as results of lay-off.

KEYWORDS *job loss, unemployment, trauma, women's employment*

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Over the past two decades, growing instability in the labor market has been accompanied by increased worker mobility, as well as by a transition from long-term employment to temporary employment, and a rise in recurrent job loss. Job loss is defined as a situation in which the employer terminates a person's job against that person's will. The literature has focused on the event itself, which has been referred to as job loss or layoffs, as well as on the situation of unemployment that results from job loss. Most of the literature defines job loss as a stressful event, which threatens the individual's economic and occupational life (Dew, Bromet, & Penkower, 1992; Yeng & Hofferth, 1998), as well as family and marital relations (Kraft, 2001; Vinokur, Price, & Caplan, 1996).

Job loss undermines the individual's self-esteem, to the point of causing feelings of insecurity and helplessness vis-à-vis one's social surroundings and vis-à-vis the workplace which caused the harm (Price, Friedland, & Vinokur, 1998). In addition, studies have revealed a correlation between job loss and depression (Dooley, Catalano, & Wilson, 1994; Vinokur, Price, & Schul, 1995).

Job loss is also a traumatic event (Soper & Von Bergen, 2001). Study participants who experienced job loss were defined as survivors. These studies relate to job loss as a traumatic event, and use the term trauma to represent the pain, difficulty, and depression that accompany job loss (Armstrong-Stassen, 1994; Sales, 1995). However, even though researchers have used the term trauma in the context of job loss, studies on the topic have not used the measures delineated in the DSM-IV (APA, 1994), which are the accepted measures for examining traumatic events. Hence the question: Is job loss actually a traumatic event that is inherently different from a stress event, and what are the implications of job loss?

To date, most studies have focused on people who have lost one job. However, in light of the unstable labor market today, a person is likely to experience recurrent job loss (Moore, Grunberg, & Greenberg, 2004). Gallo et al. (2006) defined recurrent job loss as exposure to involuntary job loss more than once in a person's lifetime. In that situation, individuals have to cope with recurrent experiences of job loss and unemployment. Therefore, it is possible that the perception of job loss as a stressful or traumatic event is related to the number of times a person has experienced involuntary job loss. Repeated exposure to stressful or traumatic events can increase the individual's vulnerability and even lead to the development of post-traumatic stress disorder (Hantman, Solomon, & Horen, 2002; Herman, 1992). However, as mentioned, to the best of our knowledge this issue has not been examined sufficiently in the context of job loss in general and recurrent job loss in particular.

The prevailing assumption has been that the adverse effects of job loss are less serious for women than for men. In that connection, researchers have proposed that women define their social roles along three main dimensions

of life—home, children, and career, whereas men define their roles along one main dimension, namely their career and their occupation (Zikic, Burke, & Fiksenbaum, 2008). According to that perspective, it can be expected that for women, job loss only harms the third dimension of their lives, i.e., the dimension of career, and that the other two dimensions remain unaffected. Moreover, because the male figure is typically considered the main provider of the family, it can be expected that even if termination of the woman's job damages the secondary source of income, the family's main source of income will not be affected (Leana, Feldman, & Tan, 1998; Thomson, 1997; Wanberg, Griffiths, & Gavin, 1997). In contrast, other researchers have revealed that job loss affects all domains of the women's lives, and that women are more likely than men to experience mental health consequences such as stress and depression as a result of job loss (Dew, Bromet, & Penkower, 1992; Lovell & Oh, 2003; Perrucci, Perrucci, & Targ, 1997).

The growing proportion of women in the labor force has made them a target population for recurrent job loss, and highlights the importance of examining their attitudes toward the situation and their strategies for coping with it. In addition, more women have been affected adversely by those developments than men (Hyde & Kling, 2001). Against that background, the present study was conducted among a sample of women who had lost their jobs in the central region of Israel. The goals of the study were to examine whether: (1) women perceived job loss as a stressful or traumatic event; (2) the perceptions of women who experienced one-time job loss differed from those of women who have experienced recurrent job loss; and (3) recurrent job loss correlated with mental health symptoms.

WOMEN AND EMPLOYMENT IN ISRAEL

In Israel, women comprise 46.5% of all employed persons, and their share of the labor market has been increasing from year to year. About 91% of the women in the labor market are salaried employees, whereas the proportion of male salaried employees is 82.7% (Tamir, 2007). As salaried employees, women are more exposed to job loss and unemployment. In 2005, the unemployment rate for Israeli females was 9.5%, compared with 8.5% for males. That year, 221,600 job seekers reported to government employment service offices (the institutions that help unemployed persons find jobs and arrange for unemployment allowances while they are out of work). Of those, 124,800 (56%) were women (Tamir, 2007). A woman who loses her job must physically apply to the employment service office in her locality of residence and will be entitled to unemployment benefits in accordance with the qualifying period of previous employment as specified by law, and in accordance with the number of dependents in her household. This is the only government service available to persons in Israel who have been laid off, and it is the only way that they can obtain financial support.

The unemployment benefit amounts to 75% of the average wage received during the three months preceding unemployment. The maximum period for which unemployment benefits are paid is 175 days, as defined by law (www.btl.gov.il, Israel Central Bureau of Statistics, 2007).

METHOD

Sample

Participants were women clients at seven employment bureaus in the central region of Israel. Thus, all of them had been laid off and had worked for at least 175 days to qualify for governmental unemployment benefits. Between October and December 2006, the investigators and an interviewer personally approached all the women in all seven bureaus who were waiting in line each day that the bureaus were open at the employment bureaus and asked them to participate in the study. All of the women we approached self-identified as meeting the legal criteria for unemployment compensation and that they had come to the employment bureau to register for unemployment allowance. Of those women, 134 (75.8%) agreed to participate in the study. Considering correlation and regression tests to be used in this analysis, the sample size necessary was determined by the ratio of the number of variables (7) and the examination of interactions (3) (Tabachnick & Fidell, 2007). Therefore, the number of factors to be included in the regression had to be more than 10, and we thus aimed to sample over 100 participants so as to have at least ten participant for each variable. All the participants provided signed written informed consent and the study protocol was approved by the university institutional review board.

Upon their self-administered questionnaire report of the number of layoffs each respondent had experienced during the last six months, participants were divided into two groups: those who had been laid off once ($n = 71$), and those who had been laid off two or more times, i.e., those who had experienced "recurrent job loss" ($n = 63$). The proportion of the Israeli population residing in the central region of Israel, and the proportion of women employed in that region is relatively high. (www.btl.gov.il, Israel Central Bureau of Statistics, 2007). The study focused specifically on the above women population.

Instrument

The research instrument consisted of the following questionnaires.

Sociodemographic questionnaire. A frequently used sociodemographic questionnaire was administered, which included closed questions relating to the participants' sociodemographic characteristics (age, country of birth, year of immigration, level of education, occupation, socioeconomic status, marital

status, and number of children), as well as questions about the participant's psychological state and other life events (see, for example, Dekel & Nuttman-Shwartz, 2009). Besides those questions, the investigator added three more items. One item related to the number of times the participant had lost her job during the last six months, on a scale ranging from 1 (*once*) to 4 (*four times*). The second item examined the amount of time the women had been employed at her previous job, on a 3-point scale: 1 (*up to one year*), 2 (*2–5 years*), 3 (*over 5 years*). The third item related to the participant's employment status at her previous job: 1 (*temporary*), 2 (*permanent*).

Cognitive appraisal questionnaire. Lazarus and Folkman (1984) developed this instrument, which consists of 12 items that examine not only the extent to which job loss poses a threat but also the extent to which it poses a challenge. In this context, challenge describes coping efforts aimed at facilitating positive affect, which bolster or preserve the positive emotion of hope (Folkman & Moskowitz, 2000) and facilitate opportunities to learn and grow (Fugate, Kinicki, & Prussia, 2008). In contrast, threat refers to concerns about potential and future losses as a result of job loss, as well as threats to future job opportunities (Fugate, Kinicki, & Prussia, 2008).

The instrument was particularly relevant to this study, in light of research evidence indicating that despite the threats posed by job loss, it can be perceived as a challenging event (Eby & Buch, 1995; Hartley, 1980; Latack & Dozier, 1986). The questionnaire consists of 17 items, based on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (*to a great extent*) to 5 (*not at all*). We examined cognitive appraisals through items representing various emotions, and aggregated those items into three categories: appraisal of challenge; appraisal of threat; and appraisal of coping ability. The first factor consisted of six items, which reflected the extent to which the participant perceives the event as challenging (e.g., "To what extent do you view job loss as a challenge to your personal maturity?"). The second category consisted of seven items, which reflected the extent to which the participant perceives the event as a threat (e.g., "To what extent do you view job loss and a threat to your health?"). The third category consisted of four items, which indicated the extent to which the participant believes she can cope with job loss and the difficulties generated by the event, as well as with the responses of people in her environment and with essential life tasks (e.g., "To what extent do you believe you can overcome the difficulties related to losing your job?"). The Cronbach's alpha internal consistency of the items in the questionnaire used in this study was high for two of the categories of items: challenge = .87, threat = .82, and moderate for control items = .78.

Brief symptom inventory. Derogatis (1977) developed the instrument, which consists of 53 items (e.g., "to what extent do you feel inferior to others?"). The items cover nine symptom dimensions: hostility, anxiety, somatization, phobic anxiety, paranoid ideation, depression, obsession-compulsion, interpersonal sensitivity, and psychoticism. We asked participants to indicate

the extent they felt those symptoms during the two weeks prior to completing the questionnaire, on a scale ranging from 0 (*not at all*) to 4 (*to a very great extent*). We assessed the participants' general perceptions of distress on the basis of the General Severity Index (GSI), which we computed as the mean of the scores on all 53 items. The questionnaire has been tested and validated among diverse populations in Israel (e.g., Dekel, Ginsburg, & Hantman, 2004), and the high Cronbach's alpha internal consistency of the GSI (.95) indicates that the questionnaire examines one characteristic rather than a number of characteristics. For that reason, we used the General Severity Index in an attempt to replicate the findings of previous research, which have revealed that job loss increases levels of mental health symptoms, such as those of depression and anxiety (e.g., Mallinckrodt & Bennett, 1992; Price, Van Ryn, & Vinokur, 1992). The Cronbach's alpha internal consistency of the instrument used in the present study was .98.

Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) questionnaire. We examined symptoms of PTSD using a self-report scale, based on criteria delineated in the DSM-IV (American Psychiatric Association, 1994). The questionnaire consists of 17 statements that describe typical symptoms manifestations of PTSD responses following a traumatic event. We asked participants to indicate whether they had experienced the difficulty described in each statement over the past month. Researchers have used the instrument extensively to screen for PTSD symptoms and assess its intensity among various populations in Israel, including war victims (Solomon et al., 1993). The Cronbach's alpha internal consistency of the questionnaire used in this study was .94.

Procedure

The research questionnaire was self-administered, and responses were anonymous. Awareness that a self-reported questionnaire might introduce potential for social acceptability bias emphasized in the consent letter and emphasized the fact that the researcher was independent and that their responses would remain anonymous. Questionnaires were administered in the following sequence: the sociodemographic questionnaire, the cognitive appraisal questionnaire, the BSI, and the PTSD questionnaire. This sequence was maintained to reduce the variance that can be caused by the potential impact of the first questionnaires on the participants' responses to subsequent questionnaires. The investigator and interviewer were present while the participants were completing the questionnaire and answered questions as needed. Twenty-five women (18.6%) completed only part of the questionnaire, and 18 (13.4%) refused to complete it (total response rate of 75.7%, $N = 134$). The time required to complete the questionnaire ranged from 30 to 45 minutes. In addition to the university procedures, the study was approved by the ethics committee of the regional employment bureau.

Data Analysis

We analyzed the data using six statistical tests. *t-Tests* were performed to examine differences in mean scores among the group of women who had been laid off once versus those who had been laid off more than once. *ANCOVAs* and *MANOVAs* were used to calculate *F* values for comparison of mean scores. χ^2 tests were conducted to examine relationships between groups of nominal variables. *Pearson's tests* were performed to examine correlations between ordinal variables. *Spearman's tests* were conducted to examine correlations between nominal variables or variables based on non-parametric scales. In addition, hierarchical multiple regression analysis was conducted to examine the contribution of number of lay-offs to perceived threat and possible PTSD symptoms. The criterion for multicollinearity was $r = .80$. The criterion for entering the variables into the regression was that they were associated with the outcome variable at $p < .05$. The fit of the model used in the study was evaluated by R^2 values.

RESULTS

The sample consisted of 134 women aged 30–45 years (Mean (M) = 38, Standard deviation (SD) = 5.64). Of those women, 80% were mothers with 1–6 children under the age of 18 years (Mean (M) = 2.2, Standard deviation (SD) = 1.06); 86% of the women were Israeli-born, 51% lived in the central region of Israel; 83 (62%) of the women were married, 28 (21%) were divorced, and 23 (17%) had never been married; 71 (53%) of the women had secondary education, and 63 (47%) had post-secondary or academic education; 75 (56%) of the women were secular, 41 (31%) were traditional, and 18 (13%) were religious; and 68 (51%) reported that their income level was lower than average, 31 (23%) reported an average income level, and 33 (25%) reported that their income level was higher than average.

We examined how women perceived job loss, and whether perceptions of women who had experienced one-time job loss differed from those who had experienced recurrent job loss. First, we compared perceptions of job loss among two groups of women: those who had experienced job loss once and those who had experienced recurrent job loss (between two and five times). *MANOVAs* were conducted to examine differences between the two groups in four dimensions: perceived threat, perceived challenge, emotional stress, and psychiatric symptoms. No significant differences were found: $F(4, 119) = 1.73, p > .05$.

To examine differences in the extent of perceived challenge versus perceived threat, we conducted 2×2 *ANOVAs* (one-time/recurrent job loss \times challenge/threat) with repeated measurements. The tests revealed significant differences between the two perceptions: $F(1, 132) = 86.16, p <$

.01, $\eta^2 = .40$. For both groups, the extent of perceived challenge following job loss ($M = 3.25, SD = .63$) was significantly higher than the extent of perceived threat ($M = 2.34, SD = .93$). In this connection, the mean score for perceived challenge (3.25) was equivalent to “greater than average” level, whereas the mean score for perceived threat (2.34) was equivalent to a “low level.”

Levels of threat correlated positively and significantly with emotional stress and psychiatric symptoms (Table 1). The more the women perceived job loss as threatening, the higher their levels of emotional stress and psychiatric symptoms. Regarding perceived challenge, we found significant negative correlations with emotional stress and psychiatric symptoms only among the women who had been laid off once. The more the women in that group perceived job loss as a challenge, the lower their levels of emotional stress and psychiatric symptoms.

We conducted Fisher *Z* tests to examine the differences in the correlations between perceptions of job loss and levels of emotional stress among women who had experienced job loss once versus those who had experienced recurrent job loss. Those tests revealed a significant difference between the two groups with regard to perceptions of job loss as a challenge and levels of emotional stress: $Z = 1.98, p < .05$. For women who had been laid off once, the more the event was perceived as a challenge, the lower their levels of emotional stress. Regarding perceptions of job loss as a threat, no correlations were found between participants who had been laid-off once and those who had been laid-off more than once. However, the number of layoffs was associated with the women’s perceptions of job loss as a challenge.

We also sought to investigate whether recurrent job loss was related to the development of emotional stress and psychiatric symptoms. Besides examining the correlations between the number of layoffs and mental health consequences (through the GSI and PTSD), we also examined the impact of sociodemographic variables on the women’s perceptions of job loss and

TABLE 1 Pearson’s Correlations Between Perceived Threat/Perceived Challenge, and Emotional Stress and Psychiatric Symptoms, $n = 134$

No. of laid off	Psychological responses	Perceived threat	Perceived challenge
Laid off once	Psychological stress	0.703***	-0.26*
	Psychiatric symptoms	0.574***	-0.217
Laid off more than once	Psychological stress	0.676***	0.08
	Psychiatric symptoms	0.556***	0.124
Total	Psychological stress	0.689***	-0.068
	Psychiatric symptoms	0.566***	-0.51

Note. * $p < 0.05$; *** $p < 0.001$.

TABLE 2 Distribution of Marital Status, by Number of Layoffs

Marital status	Laid off once (<i>n</i> = 71)		Laid off more than once (<i>n</i> = 63)		Total	
	<i>n</i>	%	<i>N</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%
Never married	8	34.8	15	65.2	23	17%
Married	52	62.7	31	37.3	83	62%
Divorced	11	39.3	17	60.7	28	21%
Total	71	53.0	63	47.0	134	100

on the development of mental health consequences. The results revealed a significant correlation between the women's marital status and recurrent job loss: $\chi^2 = 8.28, p < .05$.

The percentages of never-married and divorced women (62.7%) who had experienced recurrent job loss were higher than those of married women (37.3%) (Table 2). To examine whether emotional stress and psychiatric symptoms were related to the number of times the women had experienced job loss, we conducted 2×2 MANOVAs (one-time/recurrent job loss \times family status). The analyses revealed significant differences by marital status: $F(4, 232) = 3.32, p < .05, \text{Eta}^2 = .05$. No significant differences were found between women who had experienced job loss once and those who had experienced recurrent job loss: $F(4, 232) = 1.03, p > .05$; nor was an interaction found between number of layoffs and marital status: $F(4, 232) = 1.58, p > .05$ (Table 3).

Scheffe paired comparisons revealed significant differences between the never-married and married women. However, no significant differences were found between the divorced women and the women in the other two groups. The never-married women showed higher levels of emotional stress and psychiatric symptoms than did the married women. This result indicates that the women's perceptions of job loss were associated with their marital status.

TABLE 3 Measures of Emotional Stress and Psychiatric Symptoms, by Marital Status—Means and Standard Deviations, *n* = 134

Measures	Marital status						<i>F</i> (2, 117)	Eta ²	Power
	Never married		Married		Divorced				
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>			
Emotional stress	2.12	.78	1.53	.55	1.76	.86	5.91**	.04	.06
Psychiatric symptoms	1.85	.63	1.37	.44	1.59	.65	6.15**	.03	.09

Note. ***p* < 0.01.

TABLE 4 Hierarchical Regression Analysis of Factors Associated with Symptoms of PTSD, $n = 134$

Measure	Step 1 (β)	Step 2 (β)
Number of laid off	.19*	.09
Perceived threat		.54***
R^2	.04*	.31***
ΔR	.04*	.27***

Note. * $p < 0.05$; *** $p < 0.001$.

Hierarchical regression was conducted to identify the independent relations of the various study variables to PTSD symptoms. The combined set of variables explained 31% of the variance in PTSD symptoms.

In the first step, number of laid-off were explained 4% of the variance in PTSD symptoms ($\beta = .19, p < .05$), high numbers of laid-off were associated with higher levels of PTSD symptoms. In the second step, perceived threat variable was entered. This variable explained 27% of the variance in PTSD symptoms ($\beta = .54, p < .001$), a high level of sense of perceived threats was associated with high levels of PTSD symptoms (Table 4). The perceived threat variable reduced the effect of number of laid-off variable on the PTSD ($\beta = .09, p > .05$). This result indicated that perceived threat variable was a significant mediator variable between number of laid-off and the level of PTSD symptoms (Sobol-Test $Z = 1.99, p > .05$).

DISCUSSION

In this study, we examined women’s responses to recurrent job loss. One of the main study goals was to examine whether job loss was considered a stressful or traumatic event. In addition, we sought to explore the mental health consequences of job loss for women who have been laid-off.

The main finding was that most women who participated did not perceive job loss as a stressful or traumatic event. Rather, most of the women participating in the study perceived job loss both as a challenge and a threat—although they tended to perceive it more as a positive and challenging event more than as a threatening one. This result was consistent with Jones’s (1989) findings, which revealed that although people viewed job loss as a negative life event, they also appreciated it as an opportunity to change their direction in life and to improve their career prospects. Notably, women are still more likely to experience job loss than men, due to childbearing and the conflict with household responsibilities (Reitman & Schneer, 2005).

In addition, the findings indicated that the women’s assessments of the event have more of an impact on their perceptions than the number of times they have experienced job loss. The more the women perceived job

loss as threatening, the more they reported emotional stress and psychiatric symptoms. Conversely, the more the women perceived job loss as challenging, the lower their levels of emotional stress and psychiatric symptoms were.

The hypothesis that job loss would be perceived more as a threat than as a challenge was based on research literature that portrays job loss as a stressful, traumatic event and defines people who have been laid-off as "survivors" (Armstrong-Stassen, 1994; Sales, 1995; Soper & Von Bergen, 2001). Contrary to expectations, the participants in the present study perceived job loss as a challenge rather than as a stressful or traumatic event. This finding can be explained from several perspectives. First, in light of the instability of the labor market throughout the world in recent decades, job loss has become prevalent. As a result, job loss has changed from a personal experience to a universal phenomenon. During the last quarter of 2006, the percentage of unemployed persons in Israel was estimated at 8.3% (Israel Central Bureau of Statistics, 2006). Because so many individuals in Israeli society have experienced job loss at various stages of their lives, the event is not perceived as stressful or traumatic. Moreover, in Israel, which is still coping with an existential threat, the experience of trauma is associated with the security situation, e.g., with war and terror attacks that are accompanied by loss of lives (Bleich, Gelkopf, & Solomon, 2003). Because job loss does not involve loss of life or a threat to individual security, it is not considered a traumatic event even if it is accompanied by loss of resources. It is also possible that because the women who participated in this study still qualified for unemployment benefits (i.e., the 175-day period of unemployment benefits had not yet ended), they did not yet feel the economic threat, and they still felt hopeful about finding a new job. All of these explanations might also account for the similarity in responses among the women in the two groups: those who been laid-off once versus those who had been laid off more than once.

Another noteworthy finding revealed in this study was the correlation between perceptions of job loss as a threat, and the development of emotional stress and psychiatric symptoms. This finding was consistent with the approach of Leana and Feldman (1998), who predicted that termination of employment causes stress reactions due to the change in career status, which are reflected in intensified psychological and physiological responses. This finding was also consistent with Lazarus and Folkman's (1984) stress theory, which argued that when individuals assess an event as a threat and perceive themselves as lacking the resources to cope with the threat, then they will experience it as a stressful event, and they develop symptoms of emotional stress. Moreover, according to Conservation of Resources theory (Hobfoll, Dunahoo, & Monnier, 1995; Hobfoll, Wells, & Lavin, 1999; Hobfoll, 2001), individuals will develop stress responses to the extent that they feel endangered and are afraid of losing resources, or in cases in which they

actually lose resources and lack other resources to compensate for the loss. Based on that perspective, it is possible that the women participating in the present study perceived their job loss as a threat because they felt that they had lost potential or actual resources as a result of being laid off. In the wake of job loss, the women lose secure anchors such as their income, occupation, role definition, and work colleagues. The loss of these resources and the belief that it will be difficult to mobilize alternative or similar resources create a sense of stress that can intensify mental health symptoms.

Scarcity of resources is also reflected in the finding that never-married women experienced more layoffs, were more likely to perceive job loss as threatening, and were more likely to develop mental health symptoms than married and divorced women. It is possible that unmarried women are more vulnerable because they lack spousal support. However, it can be argued that spousal support mitigates the negative effects of unemployment and facilitates problem solving (Vinokur, Price, & Caplan, 1996; Walsh & Jackson, 1995).

In addition, it can be argued that the single lifestyle has not been sufficiently legitimized in Israel, which emphasizes married life and childbirth (Schur, 1983). Hence, never-married women perceive themselves as being marginal and excluded in Israeli society, and those who have lost their jobs might feel doubly excluded, i.e., they have never been married and are also out of a job (Izraeli, 1999). In that connection, research on women's employment has dealt extensively with the conflict between work and home, because both contexts are considered an integral part of the woman's self image (Armstrong-Stassen, 1994; Kulik, 2000; Leana, Feldman, & Tan, 1998; Thomson, 1997; Wanberg, Griffiths, & Gavin, 1997).

Before concluding, the limitations of the study need to be mentioned. The main limitation related to the sample, which consisted of only 134 unemployed women who were surveyed at employment bureaus in Israel. All of the women had lost their jobs within the past half year, whether the actual cause of their job loss was personal or economic—and they were still eligible for unemployment benefits. However, the sample focused on women residing in the central region of Israel and does not represent the overall population of unemployed women in Israel. The limited sample size and use only of a sample that was derived from women in line at the unemployment bureau in one area of Israel provided limited statistical power and reduced the generalizability of the findings as our sample may not have represented the situation of unemployed women from other areas of the country or in localities where employment options were more limited. In addition, although we informed participants of the anonymity of the questionnaire data, the self-reported information might have introduced social acceptability bias. Hence, to strengthen the possibility of detecting significant independent effects of multiple variables while controlling for multiple confounding variables, as well as the generalizability and external validity of the findings, it would

be worthwhile to enlarge the sample and include unemployed women who do not report to employment bureaus, as well as unemployed women from other regions of Israel and provide valid assessments of traumatic stress disorder.

Practical Implications

Several practical implications for professionals in the field can be elicited from the findings of this study. The instability of the labor market today has been accompanied by an increase in rates of recurrent job loss in general and job loss among women in particular. In light of this situation, the social work profession should focus efforts on two main dimensions of unemployment, which have been neglected to date (Gal & Weiss, 2005). Social workers should participate in the political struggle to reduce unemployment and improve the quality of life for women who have been adversely affected by job loss. Moreover, in light of the finding that never-married women are particularly vulnerable to recurrent job loss, there is a need to develop specific responses for that population. It is also important to make employers more aware of the situation faced by these women, who are sometimes the first ones to be laid off because it is assumed that they do not have dependents.

In sum, the contribution of the present study to broadening knowledge about women's perceptions of job loss is noteworthy. The findings indicate that the number of layoffs did not have a significant impact on the development of emotional stress and psychiatric symptoms. Rather, the development of those symptoms was affected by the women's perceptions of job loss as threatening. In addition, most of the women participating in this study perceived job loss as a challenging event, and did not perceive it stressful or traumatic. Finally, the findings provided insights regarding the vulnerability of never-married women. Notably, job loss is more prevalent among that population, and they are at greater risk for developing emotional stress and psychiatric symptoms as a result of the event.

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