November 1980

Psychological and Emotional Impact of Unemployment

Michael Borrero
University of Connecticut

Follow this and additional works at: https://scholarworks.wmich.edu/jssw

Part of the Clinical and Medical Social Work Commons, and the Social Work Commons

Recommended Citation
Available at: https://scholarworks.wmich.edu/jssw/vol7/iss6/12

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Social Work at ScholarWorks at WMU. For more information, please contact maira.bundza@wmich.edu.
PSYCHOLOGICAL AND EMOTIONAL IMPACT OF UNEMPLOYMENT

1. Michael Borrero
Associate Professor
School of Social Work
University of Connecticut

We learned from contrast. We learned from unemployment the true significance of work. Only when a man is thrown out of employment does he perceive how much of his life is under the dictatorship of the job. Work establishes the basic routine of modern life. (Eli Ginzberg, The Unemployed, 1943)

Having seen the discussion of the meaning of work and the important role it plays in our lives, as developed by Borrero and Rivera, we now need to address what happens to people when they want to work but are unable to because of economic recessions, depressions and economic policies. The focus of the following paper is to review the literature concerning the psychological and emotional stresses that are brought about as a result of unemployment.

A review of the literature of the effects of unemployment suggests some important gaps in knowledge as well as some methodological problems. The vast majority, at least 80%, of the literature was written during and shortly after the depression of the 1930's. Since then, the interest in unemployment has been minimum and sporadic. It appears that social scientists become interested in the subject of unemployment when the unemployment rate reaches high levels and becomes a social concern, if not a social problem. This reactive interest in unemployment has limited the quality of research and knowledge in the field. For example, we know that some physical and emotional stresses result from unemployment. But we do not know what specific psychological damage, if any, occurs as a result of unemployment. The major problem here is that we have interviewed or observed the unemployed person after job loss, sometimes years after being unemployed, and from these interviews or observations we have made inferences about the effects of unemployment, without prior knowledge of the person's emotional condition. Also, many of these studies, because of their time delay, have tended to confuse the effects of unemployment with the effects of poverty.

Ideally, to study the effects of unemployment, we should match our sample group with a similar group who are employed while controlling for demographic and social characteristics. Another
possibility, although more costly, would be to do a longitudinal study from the onset of unemployment and follow the group for a period of time during periods of unemployment as well as during periods of employment. Such research designs would yield a great deal more knowledge than we presently have.

A further difficulty with the unemployment literature is that it is not quantified. This is especially true with the earlier literature. We have excellent personal accounts of the tragedies unemployment has brought some individuals and families; and for the time, these accounts met their purpose. However, given the growth of the population, the economy and technological advancement, and the fact that our definition of "full-employment" keeps increasing from 3% to 4% to 5%, and even higher, it would seem imperative that we obtain quantifiable data as to the impact of unemployment. Without such data our knowledge of the effects of unemployment will remain incomplete and impressionistic. Such a state of knowledge does not help policy makers in making effective decisions which affect millions of people; it does not help social workers and clinicians in providing needed services; and most importantly, it does not help the unemployed.

In spite of their shortcomings, these studies have been valuable in providing basic knowledge in the field of unemployment. Judging from the few recent studies that have emerged, and which will later be addressed, it appears that better methodological studies are being conceived both qualitatively and quantitatively. Having prefaced this review of the literature with this brief critique, let us move on to the literature itself.

Several attempts have been made to trace the psychological stages or phases which the unemployed goes through. Zawadski and Lazarsfeld, after analyzing 57 autobiographies of the unemployed, identified six stages or moods the unemployed person experiences. Stage one, which comes with dismissal, usually causes

...a feeling of injury; sometimes strong fears and distress; sometimes an impulse toward revenge; hatred; indignation; fury; thereafter (stage two) comes a stage of numbness and apathy that is gradually, (stage three) replaced by calming down and an increase in steadiness, bringing one again to a relative balance. This mental stage is characterized by a resumption of activity, the unemployed becomes calm as they see that things go along somehow and adapt themselves to the circumstances; they trust in good fate or in their own ability, and try to believe that the solution will improve soon. (stage four) But this hope becomes constantly weaker, when they see the futility of effort. (stage five) When the
solution becomes harder, the old savings and new sources exhausted, then comes the hopelessness which expresses itself at first in attacks of fear, for instance, fear of winter, and of homelessness, which culminates in distress, the expression of which is the thought of attempt at suicide. (stage six) After these outbreaks usually comes sober acquiescence or dumb apathy, and then the alternation between hope and hopelessness, activity and passivity, according to the momentary changes in the material situation. /1/

Bakke, who studied extensively the behavior of 25 unemployed families between 1932-1937, identified five stages which the unemployed and his family go through. Stage one, momentum stability, is characterized by no immediate change in family functioning resulting from unemployment. The unemployed person uses most of the time to find new employment, works around the house and spends more time with the children. Financial resources are stretched out to meet basic needs. Stage two, unstable equilibrium, increases family conflict. The wife begins to seek employment and this shifts domestic responsibilities to other members of the family, especially older children, since the husband is also looking for employment. Management of financial assets becomes problematic. If the wife is working she gains prestige and handles the bills. If no one in the family is working, every expenditure becomes a major decision and potential source of conflict. Family disorganization characterizes stage three. All of the difficulties experienced in stage two are also experienced here but with greater intensity. Pressures from creditors, public opinion and loss of friends reinforce the feeling of failure, which intensifies domestic conflicts. The husband's, wife's, and children's role in the family becomes confused, and if not quickly resolved, it will destroy the family unit.

Stage four, experimental readjustment, calls for family readjustment and acceptance to their new situation. How the family previously functioned is abandoned and new standards for family functioning are developed. This forces the wife to be more realistic about the present situation in the manner she manages and plans for the future. The husband is most threatened by these changes. If the wife and/or children are working, their role of provider becomes more acceptable, and maintaining social fronts becomes less important. Financial obligations are being met, emotional acceptance to the readjustments are materializing and respect for each other strengthens the family unit.

The final stage, permanent readjustment, focuses on dealing with the present and planning for the future given the changes that have occurred. Family conflicts have almost disappeared and family activities become a cohesive force. The family has reached a new
Studying the course of unemployment of a group of men, Gatti found that at first the "laid off worker" feels surprise, particularly if the individual has never before been unemployed, then fear, with renewed hope while the worker is actively looking for a job, and then anxiety. But when hope fails, the unemployed have a feeling that 'life has forgotten them' and become apathetic. Gatti feels that unemployment has its most marked effects at this stage, and that this is the point of greatest crisis. Long durations of unemployment makes the individual even more apathetic.

While analyzing the literature concerning the psychological effects of unemployment, Eisenber and Lazrfield identify four major attitudes and stages of unemployment: (1) the unbroken: the unemployed is persistent in obtaining employment; he is often "lucky" in finding a job, (2) the resigned: here the unemployed faces extreme limitations of all needs; future plans are indefinite and there is little hope of things improving. This stage is characterized by hopelessness, (3) the apathetic stage is dominated by unconcern and idleness. As in stage 1, there are no future plans. In stage (4), the distressed life is surrounded by bitterness, hatred, and hopelessness. Flight into drunkenness and thoughts of suicide are quite common.

A careful examination of these various stages of unemployment suggests that these emotional experiences are very similar psychological reactions to loss, grief and separation. They are also very similar to the reactions of dying patients. Kubler-Ross, in her work with dying patients, identified five phases which most dying persons experience: denial and isolation; anger, bargaining; depression, and acceptance. A cursory examination of the stages which the unemployed experiences suggest that losing employment and prolonged unemployment produce some very definite psychological reactions which have a pattern. The fact that not all of these stages are identical may be explained by the lack of systematic research carried out in studying the unemployed.

Psychological Reactions to Unemployment

The anticipation and the actuality of job loss is known to produce many different emotional reactions. These reactions vary from simple stress to severe depression and actual suicide. What factors cause one person to react more severely than another is still unknown. What we do know is that unemployment affects everyone in one form or another.
One methodologically sound and important study concerning the physical and emotional reaction to unemployment was conducted by Kasl and Cobb. The authors were interested in studying blood pressure changes and social stress adjustment of stably employed men during the time of anticipated job loss, actual job loss and re-employment. Two comparable occupation groups were used as control groups to verify the results of the two experimental groups. After two years of carefully testing and interviewing, they found that:

...blood pressure levels during anticipation of job loss and unemployment or probationary re-employment were clearly higher than during later stabilization on new jobs; men whose blood pressure remained high longer, had more severe unemployment, were lower on Ego Resilience, reported longer-lasting subjective stress and failed to show much improvement in reported well-being (interviews); within the period of anticipation, there was a clear rise in blood pressure which was correlated with subjective ratings of felt stresses... /7/

The two control groups showed no significant changes in blood pressure.

If the anticipation of joblessness is physically and emotionally stressful, what can be said about actual joblessness? For the unemployed person to experience anxiety, disorganization, depression, shame, humiliation, degradation, loss of self-worth, loss of self-confidence and hope, is not uncommon. But what is more tragic is that these feelings often lead to increased drinking, wife and child abuse, crime and suicide. But let us first look at the emotional stresses that unemployment creates before seeing how these feelings manifest themselves in destructive behavior.

The struggle between feelings of shame, humiliation, degradation, hope and pride are daily emotional experiences of many unemployed. Shame derives from the inability to do anything about their situation; especially after having been socialized to believe that if a person doesn't work it's because he or she is lazy and to be lazy is to be subhuman.

Life has made a coward of me. Sometimes I would like to bend myself in a humble way before the world and beg, 'Buy me! Buy me!' And then I burn for shame. /8/

Humiliation and degradation is a state of mind based on experiences of rejection and loss of human dignity and self-worth. Unable to find work the unemployed often feels rejected by society; unable to provide for the family and witnessing their suffering is degrading and fosters feelings of anger and inferiority, as exemplified in
these typical case records.

I look for a job. I bow with servility, I ask, I beg, I humble myself and lose my ego. I become a beast, a humiliated beast, excluded from the realm of society./9/

How hard and humiliating it is to bear the name of an unemployed man. When I go out, I cast down my eyes because I feel myself wholly inferior. When I go along the street, it seems to me that I can't be compared with an average citizen, that everybody is pointing at me with his finger. I instinctively avoid meeting anyone. Former acquaintances and friends of better times are no longer so cordial. They greet me indifferently when we meet. They no longer offer me a cigarette and their eyes seem to say, 'you are not worth it, you don't work.' /10/

The general impression that the interviews make is that in addition to sheer economic anxiety the man suffers from deep humiliation. He experiences a sense of deep frustration because in his own estimation he fails to fulfill what is the central duty of his life, the very touchstone of his manhood—the role of family provider. The man appears bewildered and humiliated. It is as if the ground had gone out from under his feet.... Every purchase of the family—the radio, his wife's new hat, the children's skates, the meals set before him—all were symbols of their dependence upon him. Unemployment changed it all. It is to the relief office, or to a relative, that the family now turns.... /11/

Although it is clinically difficult to assess the degree of mental health of individuals prior to experiencing unemployment, a relationship between unemployment, anxiety and somatic symptoms has been suggested. Shlionsky, Prue and Rose in their clinical observations of 200 unemployed men, found that a percentage, though small, of the men experienced anxiety and psychosomatic symptoms because of unemployment. /12/. According to Winick,

There are so many unconscious and group needs that work meets that unemployment may lead not only to generalized anxiety, but to free-floating hostility, somatic symptoms and the unconscious selection of some serious illnesses. /13/

As previously established, work provides order and a sense of stability. The absence of work creates a sense of atonie: a feeling of rootlessness and dissociation.
The opposite of work is not leisure or free time; it is being victimized by some kind of disorder which, at its extreme, is chaos. It means being unable to plan or to predict. And it is precisely in the relation between the desire for order and its achievement that work provides the sense of mastery so important to self-esteem. /14/

It is not surprising that a common reaction of the unemployed is the feeling of "going crazy" or "nuts" when not working. This is especially true after initial job searching efforts result in failure, and "free time" is abundant. When unemployed, the person sees "the clock go around but he has nothing to show for the hours that have passed."/15/ Time which was once an element of life to challenge and race against now merely passes by, leaving boredom, restlessness and a sense of disorganization and uselessness.

Shanmugam set out to study the level of anxiety produced by unemployment in Madras, India. Using the Taylor Manifest Anxiety Scale, the Wechsler and Hortoges Mirror Drawing Test and the Eysenck Hand Steadiness test, he compared the levels of anxiety of three groups: unemployed, underemployed and employed men. His results were interesting: the unemployed were significantly more anxious than the employed, but the underemployed were more anxious than the unemployed; as the length of underemployment increased, so did the level of anxiety, but this was not so with the unemployed. Anxiety was greatest for the unemployed between the 7 and 12 month, after which it dropped. /16/

In spite of these intense stressful feelings, the unemployed still maintains personal pride, hope and a belief that things will change for the better. For without this pride and hope there seems nothing to live for.

I am strangely bowed down. It is hunger which bends and humiliates people this way. I pull myself up, chest out, belly in. Nobody shall know that I am hungry. At least appearances should be saved. /17/

One would think that after a family had used up all of its savings, cashed in all of its insurance policies, borrowed to the hilt, it would no longer hesitate to apply for relief but such was not the case. Mrs. Bergman said that they were pretty desperate but neither she nor her husband would swallow their pride and go and make application for relief. When he sprained his ankle she decided to apply because he could no longer look for work with his additional handicap. Both cried as they spoke of this period. They were without food or money.
The children were crying from hunger and they were quarrelling with each other about what they should do but each was too nervous to take action until Mr. Bergman was injured. When her application was turned down, Mrs. Bergman went home feeling licked and decided that suicide for the entire family was the only answer. They felt that the end of the world had come and they almost lost their desire to live. /18/

Prolonged unemployment quite often results in loss of friends and greater isolation. Sometimes their loss of friends is of their own making:

Mr. Davowitz summed up the matter in these terms: their friends know their circumstances and feared to visit; that they will be offered refreshments which can only come out of the limited budget which the Davowitz have at their disposal. Hence, rather than deprive the Davowitz of much needed food, they stay away and deprive them of much needed company. /19/

The tight budget forced most men to withdraw from the unions, lodges, and sometimes even from their churches. Because they did not have a dime for a glass of beer, many men stopped seeing their friends and acquaintances, not without serious consequences, however, because the isolated man does not hear of job openings. /20/

While some old friends are lost, some new ones are also found. Briar, in her sample of long term unemployment, found that while these men and women did spend more time alone since being unemployed, they did find new friends who, too, were unemployed.

Most striking changes in friendships occurred with the persistent joblessness. Half of the unemployed workers had new friendships with other persons also out of work. They saw their new friends on the average of three times a week. Consolation and understanding came quickly from those who have experienced similar problems. It is not surprising that new friendships would be generated because of joblessness, binding persons who had no other reason to be drawn together. /21/

By far, the most serious emotional stress experienced by the unemployed is depression. Failure to obtain employment over a period of time develops into feelings of self-recrimination and depression. Briar, in her study of unemployment during the Boeing recession in the early 1970's, noted that during the second phase of unemployment, when joblessness became a way of life, workers shifted the blame for
their unemployment from the system to themselves. According to Briar:

By holding themselves responsible for their inability to find a job they are able to justify their need to persevere, and to rationalize their prolonged job hunt. /22/

To step from self-blame to depression is not difficult for the unemployed, especially for the long term unemployed. In a study of 200 unemployed men who were being psychiatrically observed and evaluated in terms of their emotional reactions to unemployment, the major observation was the depressed moods of the men.

The depressive mood was characterized by such symptoms as worry, brooding, despondency, resignation, apathy, and hopelessness. The emotional states associated with this depressive mood included such disturbances as tension, anxiety, uneasiness, jitteriness, irritability, and restlessness.

The changes in mood (depressive mood and emotional states closely associated with it) were present in 180 cases or 90 percent of the group. /23/

Depression due to joblessness takes on various forms with different persons. In some individuals depression manifests itself in terms of discouragement, hopelessness, distrust of others, lowering morale and lack of self-confidence. /24/ To others, depression takes on a more self-destructive and abusive manifestation, Komarovsky, /25/ Donig, /26/ Zawadski and Lazarfeld, /27/ and Brenner, /28/ have suggested an increase in alcohol abuse as a result of unemployment. Brenner found a definite correlation between alcohol abuse and economic recessions:

The findings of alcohol abuse are consistent with the hypothesis of increased mental disorder precipitated by social-psychological stress during economic recession... the arrest rates for driving while intoxicated in the United States as a whole, and the number of persons brought to trial and found guilty of driving while intoxicated in the city of Philadelphia (a sample city used in the study), were found to increase substantially during national economic recessions. /29/

Contemplation of and actual suicide attempts are frequent findings in the unemployment literature. Suicide is another manifestation of depressive behavior. In the 57 autobiographies of the unemployed that Zawadski and Lazarfeld analyzed, the thought of committing suicide appears in about half, 27, of the reports. Not only
is suicide often thought of, but, as the authors point out, so is ending the lives of other members of the family:

In six of the 27 cases the murder of the family was planned too. Details about the first step toward execution of this plan are reported in all six cases; two really tried but failed. /30/

The reader may also recall Mrs. Bergman's comments after having been denied relief, "Mrs. Bergman went home feeling licked and decided that suicide for the entire family was the only answer."

The relationship between crime and unemployment has been reasonably established and will be more fully covered in the coming pages. Suffice to say, that when there is no income, no personal items left to sell, and no relative or friend support, in desperation the unemployed may turn to crime.

It is clear from the preceding pages that unemployment lays a heavy blow on its victim. However, it is not only the unemployed that suffers, but those close to the unemployed also bear a heavy burden; this is especially true of family members. While unemployment does have serious effects on the family unit and its members, fortunately, these effects on the whole are not serious enough to cause separation or divorce in most families. A comprehensive review of the unemployment literature suggests that unemployment is not a cause of separation or divorce. There are some cases in which unemployment leads to separation or divorce, but these are the exception rather than the rule.* Whether divorce or separation proceedings take place after the family has been restored to economic stability is not clear and it is an area that needs careful research. It appears that while unemployment does create loss of income and family conflict, it also seems to create a closer and mutual dependency upon family members. The conflicts that do arise from unemployment stem from lack of financial resources, changes in family roles, adjustment to more frequent family member contact, increase in drinking, possible physical abuse to wife and children, sexual difficulties and greater stress and demand on the wife and children.

As previously mentioned, financial hardship is one of the most severe stresses experienced by the unemployed and their families. Unemployment, though often viewed as temporary, means the disruption of regular income, changes in spending habits and making do with less of everything. As unemployment progresses, more and more of what was

*It was recently brought to my attention that new data suggests that unemployment leads to divorce. Unfortunately, at the time of this writing this data was not available.
once considered necessities are now seen as luxuries. Savings, if there are any, are used to provide basic needs and pay overdue bills. Once savings are exhausted, the family begins to borrow from friends, local merchants and relatives. If unemployment persists, other family members decide to enter the labor market to prevent further debts. This usually creates greater conflicts and compounds the family problems beyond finances. If other family members are unable to find work, personal items—furniture, television, cars, and even wedding rings are sold. Ultimately, it boils down hope and pride: hope that work will be found, and pride to do everything possible to avoid applying for public assistance. Contrary to common belief, having to receive public assistance is humiliating and degrading to most families. It is the final step before starvation.

Changes in family roles quite often result from unemployment. These changes affect the husband, wife and children differently. Traditionally, though, less now than in previous years, the husband has been ascribed the role of provider. While during period of employment this role may not have created difficulties for the man—in fact it has been his source of power and authority over family members—during periods of unemployment, however, his role of provider is threatened as is his authority within the family. Komarovsky /31/ set out to study what happens to a man's role and authority as the economic provider of the family when he is unemployed. She interviewed fifty-nine families, who had experienced unemployment for at least one year, during the winter of 1935-1936. She discerned three patterns of changes brought about by unemployment. In the first pattern, crystallization of an inferior status, unemployment crystallized a previously existing inferior status of a despised husband. "In families illustrating this pattern the woman dominated the family prior to the depression. Furthermore, she neither loved nor respected her husband." The second pattern, breakdown of a more or less coercive control, unemployment had undermined the authority of a dominant husband over a subordinate and resentful wife. The final pattern, weakened authority of a husband over a loving wife, unemployment lowered the status of the husband and created a more equalitarian relationship. In short, Komarovsky's findings suggest that unemployment dose tend to lower the status and authority of the husband. His loss of earnings and failure to provide for the family also lowered the prestige he held and lessened the respect the wife had for him. Finally, unemployment of the husband often meant a realignment of power, prestige, and authority within the family.

Similar findings of how unemployment affects the status, prestige and authority of the husband were found by Briar, /32/ Ginzberg, /33/ and Bakke. /34/ The following case excerpts provide a range of how different husbands and wives reacted to the changes in roles:
Profound, indeed, must be the importance of the role of the provider for the man’s self-esteem to cause him to say, 'I would rather starve than let my wife work.' Or, 'I would rather turn on the gas and put an end to the whole family than let my wife support me.'

In his office interview, Mr. Cowan plaintively remarked that his wife is now wearing the pants and this makes for disturbances in the family. He said that not even in Italy or Germany, where all sorts of queer things are happening, that the male fails to remain the head of the household. He realized that his wife had reason for complaint now that he was no longer earning money. She keeps repeating; 'FDR is the head of the household since he gives me the money.' Even in families free of material tension, the failure to the man to continue as breadwinner led to a shifting in authority, usually to his wife, occasionally to an older child.

When Mr. C lost his job in Winchester's, his wife was successful in getting a job there, and he did the housework. Mrs. C thinks that this was a very bitter blow to his pride, and says that he has been a good sport about it and did not mind until the neighbors made fun of him. They saw him working outside the house. He and she have never quarreled over the housework, but she felt very badly when she saw how miserable he was, and when she is home she protects him from the criticisms of the neighbors by making certain that he engages in no domestic duties at which they will see him.

The hardest thing about unemployment, Mr. Patterson says, is the humiliation within the family. It makes him feel very useless to have his wife and daughter bring in money to the family while he does not contribute a nickel. It is awful to him, because now 'the tables are turned,' that is, he has to ask his daughter for a little money for tobacco, etc. He would rather walk miles than ask for carfare money. He had often thought that it would make it easier if he could have 25 cents a week that he could depend upon.

Not all men who are unemployed lose their status, prestige and authority in the family. Some men are better able to deal with situations and devote more time to family members and domestic chores.

As joblessness continues and the job seeker becomes more frustrated in not finding employment, more time is spent at home. This
increase in contact with family members, especially the wife, creates additional problems. In a recent interview with a married couple, the author asked the wife what she found most difficult about her husband's unemployment. Next to financial difficulties she stated that having him around the house all day long was getting on her nerves. She said she was used to her routine of housecleaning, watching television and preparing meals. But now with him around, her routine was broken and her privacy gone. She felt that she had lost some of her freedom and was compelled to pay attention to her husband when she should be doing other things around the house. "I don't like it when he is in the house all day long. I don't have any time for myself."

Ginzberg and Briar had similar findings:

...The fact that the men hung around the house led to friction. Mrs. Sullivan said there is constant bickering and quarreling in the household. Her husband is nervous; he yells at the children and at her and she nags at him because she can't stand this poverty. Maybe it's not his fault that he's unemployed, but it is a man's business to support his family.

Mrs. B exploded, he hangs around most of the day and drives me crazy. She could not stand it when he is at home because they quarrel and it seems to her that they usually do not even know the reason for the quarrel. They are both nervous and pick on each other. She is glad when he goes out and leaves her alone. /40/

Often complaints are lodged against the worker not just because he is unable to meet the financial needs of the family but also because he is 'in the way,' or demands too much attention from his wife while he is underfoot at home all day. One engineer, who spent 30 years at that occupation, discovered that being around the home all day was a real problem for his wife because it involved 'breaking into her pattern of living.' /41/

Unaccustomed to being at home during the day, feeling irritable and frustrated in not being able to find work and sensing that he is in the way at home, adds to the feeling of uselessness on the part of the husband. On the other hand, the wife too has greater demands placed on her. She has to make do with what's available, take better care of the families' possessions and plan carefully how to spend the little money that is left. All this means greater work for her in addition to being sensitive to her husband's feelings and other family members' needs. The following examples illustrates the difficulties and demands placed on the wife:
The women were constantly harassed; they walked long distances to save a penny or two on purchases. They washed and ironed everything, even the heavy sheets. They tried to cheer up their husbands. They helped their children to get along on very little. However, they found time to worry. Mrs. Shannon said that she worries and worries about her troubles and does not see any way out. She worries a great deal about the children because she wants them to have what they need but it is very hard to manage. It is extremely important for her to keep her home scrupulously clean and to follow a prescribed routine for her children as to their food and exercise. In her attempt to do all this, she sometimes has trouble keeping her courage up. Although she is not yet 31, she sometimes feels that she has been working for centuries and cannot remember when she last had a rest. /42/

Previously it was mentioned that there is evidence of unemployment leading to alcohol abuse. There is also some evidence that unemployment and the accompanying psychological stresses bring about physical abuse to children and wife. Hall, in a study of 150 cases of unemployed families, identifies 7 cases in which child and wife abuse was related to unemployment. /43/ Ginzberg /44/ cites a couple of incidents of wife abuse in his sensitive study of families during the depression. The extent to which unemployment leads to child and wife abuse is not clear. Most of our studies of the effects of unemployment have taken place during the depression. It is plausible that much of this abuse against children and wives went unreported since it was more "acceptable" than it is now. Consequently, this is another area in which more in-depth research needs to be done.

There are indications from case records of studies done during the depression that unemployment affects sexual relations between husband and wife. Komarovsky, /45/ who provides the best information available, found that 22 out of 38 had decreased their frequency of sexual intercourse. Eight of the 22 families claimed that their change in sexual contact was not related to unemployment, but to ill health and aging of the couple; the remaining 14 directly connected their decrease of sexual contact to unemployment: 11 said that they were afraid of pregnancy, 2 because the wife lost respect for the husband and 1 because of general anxiety. As Komarovsky points out, although the 8 families who attributed a decrease of sexual contact to age and health reasons were in fact a bit older, it is difficult to say whether these alleged reasons were merely convenient and socially acceptable excuses. If so, it would seem that the relationship between unemployment and sexual difficulty is much greater.

Fear of pregnancy during unemployment was sufficient reason for 11 of these families to reduce their sexual activity. This was especially true of families on public assistance, who felt that: "It
is a crime for children to be born when the parents haven't got enough money to have them properly. "A man hasn't got a right to a child unless he can support him." Ignorance and inaccessibility to birth control devices added to the fear of pregnancy. Fear of pregnancy was also used as a rationalization to avoid sexual contact when love had been lost. Decline in sexual relations due to loss of respect for the husband for failing to provide is not an uncommon reaction, especially among women who view sexual intercourse as an obligation and duty. According to Ginzberg:

Many women were distressed by their husband's failure to provide for the family. They had taken for granted, even prior to marriage, that a husband would provide for his wife and children. When a man failed to carry out his obligations, his wife frequently lost her balance. The most telling evidence is found in the changed attitude of many women toward intercourse. Mrs. Berkowitz said that she had always hated it, meaning intercourse, but never felt that she could do anything about it. But now, thank God, it was possible for her to sleep apart from her husband. Mrs. Wolfe, a much younger woman, was even more outspoken. She said that she had always been a cold person, had little interest in sexual matters. When her husband was working and supporting her, she supposed it was his right to have sexual relations and she therefore acquiesced. Now she avoids him. She has limited sexual relations to once a week and even tries to get out of this.

The excessive sexual demands of Mr. Cowan has long been cause for family friction, but Mrs. Cowan said that as long as he made a living, they went along from day to day. Now it was impossible. /46/

Similar case examples have been recorded by Komarovsky. /47/

Just as unemployment affects individuals, husbands and wives, so does it affect children. During prolonged periods of unemployment, the child, not unlike other members of the family, must do without clothing, medical care, entertainment and often food. The child too can feel the stress within the family and often witnesses the conflicts between mother and father and older brothers and sisters. As previously noted, the child is also the recipient of physical and emotional abuse stemming from parental frustration and anger. In his study of unemployed families, Ginsberg concluded that "In 80% of the families, one or more children showed evidence that their psyche had been damaged due to the father's unemployment. /48/ What were these children's psychological conditions prior to the father's unemployment is not clear; but even if only 29% of these children suffer psychological damage because of parental unemployment, it is
a serious matter. The fact is that again we know very little about the impact of unemployment on children.

From studies done during the depression we know that unemployment in the family forced many children to leave school prematurely to enter the labor market to help support the family. Unemployment and the financial hardship which it creates, prevent the development of children's special talents—musical, artistic, scholastic, etc. Children of the unemployed tend to receive lower grades in school. Children of the unemployed have frequent encounters with the law. And finally, unemployment creates great difficulties between parents and adolescent children.

Despite the genuine effort of many wives to support their husbands emotionally, the man's status deteriorated, especially in households with adolescent children. The fact that their fathers were not working; the fact that their mothers had to budget every penny, all these things proved that their fathers were failures....

The Brill's daughter wants things that other girls have and does not understand why she cannot have them. She does not see why her father cannot get a job like other men and she tells him so.

In the Gallagher family, things have reached an even worse impasse. According to both parents, the older two children are unhappy because they want things they cannot have, and refuse to listen to reason when the father tries to explain why they cannot have certain things. They point to other fathers. This leads because they are so unreasonable. When they make noise or annoy him, he flies off the handle.

Perhaps the effect of unemployment on individuals and families is best summarized by the following observation:

Unemployment was much more than a question of shortages of food, clothing and amusement. Unemployment transformed the life of the man, changed the position of the woman, and left its imprint on the physical emotional and occupational life of the children. But it did even more. Unemployment left its mark on the thinking of people.
932
References


4. Ibid. p. 371.


9. Ibid. p. 238.

10. Ibid. p. 239.


15. Ginzberg, op. cit. p. 75.

17. Zawadzki and Lazarsfeld, op. cit. p. 239.

18. Ginzberg, op. cit. p. 44.


20. Ibid, p. 60.


22. Ibid. p. 49.


32. Briar, op. cit.

33. Ginzberg, op. cit.

34. E. Wright Bakke, op. cit.

35. Komarovsky, op. cit. p. 76.
36. Ginzberg, op. cit. pp. 77-78.
38. Komarovsky, op. cit. p. 27.
41. Briar, op. cit. p. 50.
42. Ginzberg, op. cit. pp. 80-81.
44. Ginzberg, op. cit. p. 75.
45. Komarovsky, op. cit. pp. 130-133.
46. Ginzberg, op. cit. pp. 77-78.
49. Hall, op. cit. p. 383. In at least 45 cases children left school to go to work and help the family.
50. Ibid. p. 383.
52. Hall, op. cit. p. 383.
55. Ibid. p. 92.