

Social-Psychological Effects of Joblessness: The Nigerian Experience

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Abstract

Considerable body of knowledge has been amassed with respect to the psychological, sociological, medical and economic effects of joblessness on unemployment at both the micro and macro levels. There is no doubt that for the vast majority of people in this modern era, the issue of being confronted with redundancy and its consequent unemployment is a mentally disturbing and an unpleasant experience. The aim of this paper is to relay general considerations, mainly social-psychological in nature that may be relevant to professionals who encounter by virtue of depressed economy individuals adversely affected.

Keywords: Joblessness, micro, macro, levels, depressed economy.

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INTRODUCTION

The reactions of the unemployed immediate family, and in particular the wife, are seen as crucial factors in an uneasy situation [1-5]. Humans, regardless of age are at their happiest and most effective when they are confident that there are trusted persons behind them [6]. Also widely accepted, is that support increases coping ability which is the gate to health and well-being. A number of researchers [7-10] have shown how disasters are exacerbating among those who are away from their families.

Cobb [10]; Dean and Lin [11]; Kaplan, Cassel & Gore [12]; Gore [13]; Liem & Liem [14]; Rayman [15], found that support evidently buffered perceptions of economic deprivation and feelings of self-blame in the unemployed. Moss [16] has argued that those receiving social support are not dependent upon accomplishments for self-esteem, whereas the unsupported mostly resort to 'instrumental' accomplishments for their feelings of self-worth. Cobb [10] found the difference between those who were not, to be striking in relation to coronary (heart) disease. Further, Cobb and Kasl [17] noted that those individuals who had the most time unemployed and who receive the

least social support were those who reported most stress.

Lowenthal & Haven [8]; Chan [18], suggested that the presence of an intimate relationship, in terms of availability of a confidant of whom the individual could reciprocally relate, served to ameliorate social losses in role interaction. In close marriages, the tension created by the husband's unemployment is eased by the emotionally supportive wife who shares equally the problems [19-21]. Indeed, not surprisingly, Marsden and Duff [22] commented that some couples welcome the extra time together, though as Jones [23] reported, the burden of attempting to shield the wife from the full impact of unemployment seemed to put that much greater strain on husbands in close marriage.

When couples are not particularly close, the pressures of unemployment seem to be far worse [24]. Often the wife seeks employment (sometimes in an attempt to escape the house, for it is clear that shouldering some of the problems of the unemployed is no easy task), and although the financial situation may become less tenuous, other problems tend to arise in the form of role reversal and consequent resentment.

An important point needs to be mentioned, that being the inverse relationship between social class and the rate of marital breakdown by divorce or separation [25, 26]. It appears that lower-class husbands and wives tend to behave towards each other in such a way as to provide relatively little mutual psychological support [20, 27] when one or the other is exposed to a stressor [28, 29]. Furthermore, owner-case individuals are less likely to be involved in voluntary organisations that may provide extra familial supportative relationships [30, 31].

General Considerations

During the Great Depression of the 1930s, the actual reduction in wages earned was apparently less devastating than the changes in roles, or poverty was easier to bear than the husband's loss of status to some previously subordinate member of the family [32]. Well organised families tended to fair better than the poorly organised [19, 20]. The former were found to adjust realistically and work as a unit, in an attempt to overcome difficulties, whereas the latter became more disorganised as a result of parental unemployment, sometimes culminating in the family splitting. The lengthy period of downgrading, often to relief status, were the most difficult cross to bear for families, and was often marked by severe emotional reactions. However, even when family disorganisation was marked, the family tended to reorganise once the downward decline in personal and class status reached a stable point. Indeed permanent unemployment was not regarded as a lengthy traumatic experience, for the family adapted to that way of life. As the depression progressed, certain cushions were devised (Works Progress Administration and the establishment of unemployment compensation, for example) to ease the situation.

Family patterns of behaviour and the health of mutual support can be critical variables in the course and consequences of unemployment [33, 34], and although generally, beyond the family unit there seems to be a void, people who feel they belong to a wider social network of communication and mutual obligation also experience support [10, 35], in that social affiliation has anxiety reducing effects. Eitinger and Storm [36], have shown how the presence of linkages with valued groups serves to contribute towards the individual's psychological well being. Racial and ethnic group ties among former workers may be important basis for social support and exchange of communication [37]. Men depend on others for justification and admiration and few individuals cope without some support from their fellow man.

The value of keeping-in-touch with relative's friends has been reported by many pre-war and contemporary writers as a means for blue-collar workers to acquire a new job, and indeed the strategy appears to be a far more profitable line of inquiry than

that provided by public employment agencies. Gaudet and Lazarsfeld [38], found that 50% of high school leavers found jobs in this manner. Powell and Driscoll [39], also noted that, there could be a considerable value in middle-class professionals keeping in contact with friends.

Swinburne's (1981) study on unemployed professional and managerial staff, suggested that advanced warning, discussion, and information were of paramount importance in that common courtesies could considerably lessen the negative impact of job loss. Yet from the majority of studies, it appears that they are rarely available. Swinburne [21] found that the blurring of job termination (by retaining some connection with the former employer) had some beneficial effects in making life easier emotionally, in that it provided time for reflection, though it also tended to delay coming to terms with reality.

Some states and communities in the United States have developed formal mechanisms to meet preparation for job loss, and in Britain a few companies have co-operated with local authorities providing pre-layoff counseling as well as follow-up assistance. Buss and Regurn [40]; Catalano and Dooley [41], have argued that employer sponsored stress inoculation programmes, offer an ideal setting for reactive primary prevention among those workers likely to be affected by a company's economy fortunes.

The degree of control which the individual has or feels he has, over losing his job, emerged in Swinburne's [21] study, as important, particularly with regard to the intensity of negative feelings. The strength of the initial negative impact makes a person less capable of coping subsequently.

The pre-war studies seemed to largely agree upon a phasic reaction to unemployment, especially if the individual had a history of employment and was experiencing joblessness for the first time. The stages were shock, optimism, pessimism, culminating in fatalism and adjustment to long-term unemployment. Recent research tends to generally support this picture for both blue-collar and white-collar workers, though the model should not be taken too rigidly, and there is much individual variation in time between the phases. It must also be said that the shock-fatalism syndrome has been illustrated rather than tested. Powell and Driscoll [39] suggested stages of relaxation and relief, concerted effort, vacillation and doubt (when relationships with family and friends began to deteriorate). Culminating in malaise and cynicism, were appropriate for unemployed, middle-class professionals. Finely and Lee's [42] view was that unemployed executives experienced conflict and tension between current and ideal self-image, to the intensity as that expressed by dying: shock, denial, disbelief or even relief, bargaining (motivated by disbelief), guilt, and finally acceptance.

Generally speaking, the weight of evidence tends to suggest that the unemployed will be more inclined to report lack of mental well-being about four months and beyond post redundancy. It is important to note however, that periods of optimism frequently proceed period of depression.

Two major problems that become progressively more difficult as unemployment proceeds are those of organising daily life and adapting to increased leisure time. Tharmanligan & Bhatti [43] These points are particularly pertinent to blue-collar workers whose working lives have in no way qualified them to bear the responsibility for organising their own existence. It is claimed that leisure activities can provide a greater sense of achievement and satisfaction than that obtained from work, but this assumes a level of interest and skill which may not be present in many individuals, and may be difficult to foster. Meissner [44] has shown that the leisure activities of the skilled and unskilled workers to be passive and impoverished in nature.

Jahoda, Lazasfeld and Zeisel [45] have suggested that men, who can fill their time with meaningful activities while they are unemployed, will have better mental health and subjective well-being than those whose time is not so occupied. This view is strongly supported by Hepworth [46] who found it to be the best single indicator of mental health. Hepworth's [46] activity factor was found to correlate significantly with occupational level, age, general mental health and length of unemployment. Brenner and Bartell [47] found that ability to reorganize one's life following job loss so that a high proportion of time is occupied, can serve as a safeguard for well-being, and that poor psychological functioning may hinder the individual in his attempts to occupy his time constructively. Given the lower level of mental well-being in the unemployed, a vicious cycle may then be so easily set in motion.

O'Brien and Kabanoff [48] found the unemployed to engage in more varied and skillful leisure activities compared to the employed, though these activities involved fewer interactions with others. The withdrawal of social contacts must be generally avoided. When ameliorating the effects of joblessness-leisure is however less effective in comparison with work in promoting social interaction. Maintaining self-direction is a genuine problem of the unemployed and in particular for blue-collar workers.

Swinburne [21] considered activity to fulfill three purposes: maintaining mental alertness, warding off fears and doubts, and providing an objective sense of achievement. The detrimental effects of inactivity can be readily seen in both schizophrenics and depressives.

In societies where employment as an institution does not exist, and favoured by soil and climate, the need to work for a living is minimal, rituals, religious and community practices indicate a need for temporal structure [49]. The function of routine appears to ensure activity and self-direction. Self-direction individuals may be able to cope with unemployment better than those whose work has been previously regulated for them. Thus professional and managerial staff made redundant and who experienced certain autonomy in their working lives, were able to cope slightly better with increased leisure, and suffered less therefore from activity in Swinburne's [21] study. Fryer and Payne [50] found that those individuals who coped particularly well with unemployment were independent and maintained a very high level of activity, which was channeled by strongly held values towards the achievement of particular goals. Such individuals adhered to an internally self-imposed structure to achieve purposes in line with their values.

O'Brien and Kabanoff [48] on the hand, found the unemployed who considered that a job should offer skill-utilisation, variety, autonomy and challenge, display more stress symptoms than those who felt such characteristics were relatively unimportant. Those with intrinsic work orientations suffered more the longer they remained unemployed, though surprisingly this effect held for females only.

Unemployment and Its Social Causes in Nigeria

The root causes of unemployment in Nigeria include:

1. **Rising Population:** West African population, particularly Nigeria, is rising faster than job opportunities. A situation in which birth rate is rising, death rate falling and the population growth rate between 2.5% and 3% unemployment is bound to exist [51].
2. **Rural-Urban migration and Neglect of Agriculture:** In Nigeria for instance since the oil boom there had been a neglect of the agricultural sector and consequent mass exodus of able-body youths from the rural to the urban areas in search of non-existent white-collar jobs. This further reduces employment in agriculture and puts pressure on existing urban jobs.
3. **Tremendous Expansion in Educational Opportunities and Misdirected Investment in Human Capital:** There has been a very rapid expansion in West Africa, which has given rise to expanded labour markets. This has resulted to an influx of thousands of school leavers to the cities in search of wage-employment [52].
4. **Continuous Shortfall in Foreign Exchange Earnings and the Resultant Fluctuations in the Capital Expenditure of Government:** Because most West African Nations are mono-

cultural economies (export of only one commodity) the fall in their prices (such as Nigeria's Oil or Ghana's Cocoa) has led to falling foreign exchange earnings. This has further led to decline in government capital expenditure which would have been used to create jobs.

5. **Premature Retirements and Retrenchments:** Most successive West African Governments on the pretext of old age, ill health, declining productivity, misconduct and other trivialities such as inability to hoist the National Flag engage in mass retrenchment and premature retirements. During the undemocratic regime of the military Administrator of Edo State, Group Captain Baba Adamu Iyam, prematurely retrenched and retired workers, thereby creates the problem of unemployment in Nigeria and Edo State in particular [51].
6. **Automation:** This has increased production, thereby reducing jobs
7. **Economic recession:** demand for workers diminishes
8. **Jamboree of contract awards:** Human selfishness, greed, human dominion and lack of industries in the state.

Psychological Effects of Unemployment in Nigeria

The followings may be regarded as the hazardous and psychological effects of unemployment on Nigerians:

1. **High Dependency Ratio:** The mass unemployment will have to depend on the small number of the working population for their survival. This will reduce efficiency and savings.
2. **Fall in the standard of living:** unemployment, through the resulting poverty and income inequality, reduces the standard of living of the masses [53].
3. **Low investment and low national income:** As a result of low savings, investment will also fall. Through the multiplier process income will also be low thus bringing about a situation of vicious cycle of poverty.
4. **Increased Rural-Urban Migration:-** Unemployment aggravates rural-urban drift by youths who move to the cities in search of non-existent jobs. This helps also to put pressure on existing food and social amenities in the cities.
5. **Increase in social vices and crimes:-** Frustrated unemployed youths could be a recruiting source of armed robbery, prostitution, economic saboteurs, drug trafficking, smuggling, vandalisation of the oil pipe-lines and so on.

RECENT EFFORTS TO COPE WITH EMPLOYMENT IN NIGERIA

In order to find some lasting solutions to the problem of unemployment in Nigeria, the Federal

Government adopted a member of measures in 1986. For instance, in October 1986, N25 million was allocated to state and local governments in the Federation as Unemployment Grants, to be used for various Agriculture Programme, as well as providing vocational skills for unemployed school leavers [54].

The Federal Government also established a National Directorate of Employment [55]. This Directorate was charged with the responsibility of creating job opportunities for the unemployed and to implement other government measures towards solving the unemployment problem generally in Nigeria. Consequently, the NDE was formally inaugurated in November, 1986.

The NDE's underlying philosophy is anchored on the creation of employment opportunities as well at the provision of training, financing and guidance to the unemployed.

To implement this, NDE formulated four major programmes namely:

- National Youth Employment and Vocational Programme
- Small Scale Industries and Graduate Employment Programme
- Agricultural Sector Employment Programme
- Special Public Works Programme

The Youth Employment and Vocational Skill Programme has two schemes namely: the Open Apprenticeship and Waste to Wealth schemes. Under the National Open Apprenticeship Scheme (NOAS) Youths are placed as apprentices in private and public establishments for a period of one to three years. On completion of training, they are absorbed into the labour force through NDE's programme.

By the end of 1987, a total of 70,000 apprentices were learning a variety of skills all over Nigeria. In NDE's Office in Edo State, there is a register opened for the unemployed. In 1999 NDE trained 587,755 school leavers unemployed in 80 different trades. This was confirmed by the Minister of Employment, Labour and Productivity.

In an address at the NDE day, during the 20th Kaduna International Trade Fair, the Minister said "that 400,000 of those trained were already self employed, while another batch of about 32,000 were undergoing similar training, and that over 21,000 other youths had also received training under the School-On-Wheels Scheme. Under Agriculture, the Minister further mentioned that a total of 13,200 school leavers have been trained in modern agricultural practice, while 7,421 of them were assisted to set up farms.

Under the second scheme (the Waste to Wealth Schemes), discarded objects like Jewelleries, shoes, furniture and other functional and decorative items are turned into valuable products. In 1987 [55], a total of 1,500 people were undergoing training under this scheme.

The Special Works Programme identifies and executes labour intensive projects using unemployed ones. In 1987, an estimated number of 24,000 workers participated on the programme. However, more unemployed people reported [56]. In 1999/2000 Poverty Alleviation was introduced in all the states of the Federation. In each ward at least 25 people each all over the Federation were recruited and this in a very little way reduced unemployment in Nigeria.

Prior to this time 1930 an economist John Maynard Keynes Optimistically forecast “Work for all” within the next 50 years, and for decades full employment has been considered an attainable goal. Unfortunately this did not materialize.

“Unemployment is an ancient problem and probably the most widely feared phenomenon of our times” says the Organisation for Economic Cooperation Development (OECD). Renato Brunetta an Economist says “the situation is worsened by the increased of underemployment and by a general deterioration in the quality of jobs available.

As we have already seen [57], the situation in the labour market is very complex. As a result, there are many valid methods of looking for a job. Anyone who is entitled to them can make use of government unemployment benefits where available and where applicable, they can enroll at unemployment office and use services offered there, e.g. The National Directorate of Employment has a register for the Unemployed.

CONCLUSION

There seems little doubt that lack of structural activity is associated with the presence, exacerbation and continuation of various psychological symptoms. Bell, Rajendram and Theiler [58] although retraining is usually of limited value in securing new employment, the process maintains social contacts and constructive leisure time. To keep occupied appears to be the prominent consideration of the working classes. In an attempt to aim those unemployed, Diamond [59] found that organised activity tended to draw the jobless individual away from personal problems, with those partaking becoming better adjusted and more outgoing. Centres set up nowadays are widely criticized, and generally, apathy prevails. Rayman [15] puts it that minimal consciousness seems to exist in human services regarding the problems of the unemployed.

Many individuals are frustrated in their work and are prevented from self- actualizing. In such cases,

it has been argued, that redundancy and subsequent unemployment may not be such a bad thing [60]. Prior to being jobless, such individuals often desired to leave their jobs, but the risks of abandoning a good salary and what appeared to be a sound position, were too great. Being laid-off therefore made a decision for them that they had not been able to implement on their own initiative. Little [61] discussed the attempt of the unemployed to maintain cognitive consistency by emphasizing the positive aspects of unemployment. Fisher [62] noted the jobless to employ a greater number of defense mechanisms, and in particular regression and projection. Cobb [10] and Gore [13], have found that unemployment tends not to be so badly felt in a rural environments, in that social and emotional support is more forthcoming, and of course the prices of living is less, and the unemployed interests are probably restricted and less expensive in taste, compared to urban dwellers.

Fineman, Potter and Jacobs [63], found yoga, meditation, biofeedback and relaxation training to be holding operations, not cures to the stresses of unemployment. The advocacy of self-awareness programmes where misfortune may be appraised, and an individual's life reviewed and reflected upon, may be of some considerable worth, but no mention is ever made of the intellectual, psychological, and financial resources needed by the unemployed to gain benefit such courses.

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