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fostered, and siblings play a central role in that drama.

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Psychosocial Impact of Job Loss on Individuals and Families

Richard H. Price

A large number of studies have been undertaken to evaluate the psychosocial impact of involuntary job loss on unemployed workers and their families,¹ but until recently the findings have been mixed and inconclusive. The primary reason is that it has been difficult to firmly establish that job loss causes psychosocial difficulties. The rival hypothesis, that persons with mental health problems are more likely than others to lose their jobs, is difficult to rule out unless representative samples of both employed and unemployed persons can be followed over time.

In addition, most studies on the impact of unemployment have focused on individuals rather than on families. It is only recently that we have begun to gather evidence that the impact of unemployment can radiate throughout the personal-social network of the unemployed individ-

ual to his or her spouse, significant other, or children. Furthermore, most studies have gathered only a limited amount of information about the nature of the difficulties confronted by the unemployed and their families, thus limiting the opportunity to understand the processes by which job loss has its effects on individuals and their families.

MENTAL HEALTH IMPACT

A recent study by Kessler, Turner, and House² documented the mental health impact of involuntary job loss in a probability sample of currently unemployed, previously unemployed, and steadily employed persons drawn from high-unemployment census tracts in southeastern Michigan. These investigators were able to show that unemployed groups showed more symptoms of anxiety and depression than did steadily employed individuals. Furthermore, unemployed persons in the sample were three times as likely as steadily employed persons to show extreme scores on mental health symptoms.

To strengthen the evidence that unemployment was causing mental health problems rather than the reverse, Kessler and his colleagues identified a subsample of unemployed persons who had lost their jobs as a result of mass layoffs and plant closings. These people were unlikely to have become unemployed because of mental health problems. The results for this subsample were identical to those of the larger study, suggesting that involuntary job loss does indeed create mental health problems.

Considerably less research has been done to determine the causal mechanisms responsible for the mental health impact of job loss. Among the possible mechanisms for this impact are the effects of financial strain, marital difficulty and conflict, reduced affiliation in personal and social networks, and financial loss events such as loss of a house or of personal property.

Kessler and his colleagues³ have reported a series of path analyses indicating that financial strain accounts for the largest proportion of the effects of unemployment on mental health and that all other factors play a relatively minor role. These results help us gain insight into how unemployment can be translated into mental health symptoms and help explain why reemployment frequently produces a nearly complete reversal of the psychological distress associated with job loss.

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FAMILY IMPACT

Although there is a substantial body of anecdotal evidence that job loss can have an impact on family relationships, much of the research evidence on this question is mixed and subject to some of the same difficulties described above.^{4,5} In addition to problems of sample representativeness, few studies have been able to examine the impact of job loss on family life and other family members, and fewer still have obtained measures of processes by which unemployment may have its effect on family relationships. However, recently, Broman, Hamilton, and Hoffman⁶ studied a large, representative sample of families of auto workers who had recently lost their jobs or were anticipating unemployment. In particular, these investigators were able to obtain measures of conflict between the unemployed person and (a) his or her spouse and (b) children. In addition, respondents were asked about problems their children exhibited, including problems in school, behavioral and emotional problems, and sleep problems or nightmares. The results indicated that the unemployment experience has powerful negative effects on the families of workers, increasing the level of conflict, tension, and stress reported in their households. Compared with currently employed control groups, unemployed workers reported more conflict with their spouses and with their children, and reported that they were more likely to have hit, slapped, or spanked their children.

While other studies have also documented elevated family conflict and child abuse among the unemployed, few studies have obtained information on the likely reasons for this increase. However, Broman, Hamilton, and Hoffman were able to establish that financial hardship was the mechanism through which unemployment increased family

conflict. Furthermore, they found that financial hardship produced more conflict for men than for women. This finding may reflect traditional beliefs that males are failing in a major social role when they become unemployed.

FAMILY SUPPORT

Although job loss appears to increase family conflict, primarily as a consequence of financial strain, does the family play a role in ameliorating the impact of unemployment? House and his colleagues⁷ examined this question, focusing on a variety of forms of social support, including integration into affiliative networks and the availability of crisis support from friends, relatives, and co-workers. Overall, House and his colleagues found that social support works very differently for married and unmarried unemployed persons. The marital relationship provides a strong support system that has protective effects on mental health. Being married, particularly for men, increases social integration and the availability of informal social support. For the unmarried, however, social integration is a critical protective factor. Unemployed persons who are unmarried and lack strong supportive social networks are particularly at risk for mental health problems.

THE DOUBLE BURDEN OF UNEMPLOYMENT

Unemployed persons and their families face a double burden. Not only must they cope with the circumstances of unemployment itself, including financial hardship and the possibility of increased family conflict, but the unemployed person must also engage in a job search that places high demands on his or her coping resources. Any intervention

that attempts to aid individuals in coping with the transition back into the world of work must recognize this double burden.

Interventions that aid the unemployed in returning to the work force may reduce the risks associated with prolonged unemployment. Such interventions may also help the unemployed person to cope with the difficult task of job seeking, which frequently involves numerous rejections and setbacks and requires the use of social networks and effective self-presentation. One such intervention, the Jobs Project,⁸ which was evaluated in the context of the randomized field experiment, involved four major overlapping components: (1) training in job search skills, (2) an active learning process with considerable time spent rehearsing new skills, (3) inoculation against setbacks (i.e., learning groups anticipated setbacks or barriers and developed problem-solving strategies for coping with them), and (4) social support from both other group members and trainers, including the expression of empathy and validation of the participant's concerns and feelings.

Results of the randomized field experiment indicated that the Jobs intervention produced higher quality reemployment in terms of earnings and job satisfaction, as well as higher motivation among participants who continued to be unemployed. A 2½-year follow-up⁹ demonstrated continued higher monthly earnings, higher levels of employment, and fewer episodes of employer and job changes. In addition, benefit-cost analyses indicated that the higher earnings and tax revenues produced would pay for the intervention in less than 1 year.

WHO BENEFITS MOST?

One critical question about preventive interventions of the kind de-

scribed is whether they benefit the people who need them most. To answer this question, with van Ryn and Vinokur,¹⁰ I conducted analyses to identify the persons at highest risk for depression among the unemployed. In a 2½-year longitudinal study, we found that those most at risk were those who experienced high levels of financial hardship and were low in social assertiveness. These individuals also benefited most from the intervention. In fact, among high-risk individuals, the intervention cut the risk of severe depressive episodes from 50% to about 30%.

It remains to be seen if such interventions can be made even more effective by actively involving family members in the provision of social support during the job search process. This is a promising new line of inquiry and may well yield new insights about family dynamics and

support among the unemployed, as well as provide intervention prototypes that have the possibility of broad policy impact. In addition, such interventions, if made available in downsizing organizations, can have beneficial effects both for the individuals who must seek reemployment and for the work organizations, which can reduce their liability in a variety of ways.¹¹

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Attention as a Cognitive and Neural System

Michael I. Posner

The problem of understanding the nature of attention seemed intractable only a few years ago, but developments in neuroimaging and cognitive psychology now allow us to provide specific anatomical and cognitive details about the attention system of the human brain. In this article, I describe an approach to

studying the attention system similar to the one taken by psychologists and neurobiologists in studying the visual, auditory, and motor systems of human and animal brains. Locations of specific anatomical networks are related to specific computations, thus providing insights relevant to understanding the functional anatomy, circuitry, development, and pathologies of the attention system in both normal and abnormal individuals.

THE POSTERIOR ATTENTION NETWORK

By the mid 1970s, advances in research technology made it possible

to record from individual cells in various parts of the brain of alert animals orienting to simple visual stimuli. The monkey, like the human being, is a very visual animal and is able to shift attention from area to area of the visual field, either by moving the eyes or by improving efficiency at some location without any eye movement. This improved efficiency at a particular location seems to be related to the ability of some areas of the brain to enhance the functioning of individual neurons. An important part of the system producing this cellular enhancement is the posterior parietal lobe (shown in Fig. 1 as a dark square on the lateral surface of the left and right hemispheres).

Recently, similar experiments have been conducted with normal human beings who are undergoing positron emission tomography (PET) scanning. A small amount of radioactivity is introduced into the body,

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