

UNEMPLOYMENT SAPS CONFIDENCE AND PSYCHOLOGICALLY DEVASTATING, SAY ANALYSTS



Of the 12.5 million unemployed people in the United States, over 5 million have not been able to land a job for 27 weeks or longer, putting them in the ranks of the long-term unemployed. Worse still chances of them getting a job anytime soon are also fast fading. Not only are the long-term unemployed facing financial effects of losing their jobs, they are confronted with many emotional ones as well. For most of them it means a loss of identity, for a job defines them. Their unemployment goes way beyond not being able to pay the bills; the emotional concerns can also be harsh. For them it means reshuffling a life that does not have a secure income. It means no more dinner dates, going to the library to surf the net, avoiding friends, scuttling regular habits and adopting other austerity measures. Veteran Banker Emmanuel Charles cannot afford personal Internet service anymore and has to go to the library to check his mail. He drives an old Mercedes that has already logged a quarter of a million miles. The global banking meltdown cost him his job and since then he has managed to spend whatever reserves he had. In his job hunt, he sends resumes with only his cell phone number but no residential address, because he is unsure of where he will be living a month from now. Whilst attending a Davie job fair he said that it was important to keep your spirits up and not let it flag, but added that it was easier said than done. Charles is in a very difficult predicament for hiring experts predict that even in hostile employment markets, the recently employed or the first-time employment seeker find it easier to get a job than those who have been without a job for a year or more. Government statistics reveal that almost 4 million people fall into this category of being unemployed for long periods, beyond a year. That accounts for almost 40 percent of the unemployed – a staggering figure. Ann Machado, president of Creative Staffing, who assists companies with their hiring, says that he advises the jobless not to sit idle, during this period, but to volunteer for a job and not let that gap enlarge in their resume. South Florida's labor market is below the national average. While the national unemployment rate stands at 8.2 percent, its 9.6 percent in Miami-Dade and 7.5 percent in Broward. The June employment data to be released on Friday is expected to show that the trend is continuing. With so many people to choose from, employers give priorities to fresh hands and not fed-up exhausted long-term unemployed whose enthusiasm for all purposes has probably jaded. Meanwhile, the longer their joblessness continues the more their savings will shrink, state and federal jobless aid will expire and other unforeseen problems will make it even harder to compete with those who are not facing any of these problems. In 2012 Ray Sparkes had an inkling that his job would soon be history and he would lose it to outsourcing. But he was complacent and confident that his contacts, made during his stint as chief financial officer for the Florida Grand Opera, would soon find him another – they could not or did not. "I had hoped it would be easy for me," Sparkes, 60, said in a telephone interview from his North Miami home. "I feel I'm becoming a bit of a drag on the people I'm networking with at this point." His wife is in real estate but so far hasn't managed a sale this year. Sparkes since losing his job in March continues to be jobless and because of the couples dwindling finances are finding it hard to manage expenses. They have had to forego many things, among them their regular date on Fridays which now they spend at home. Both enjoyed motorcycle riding and tried to stay abreast of their regular rides, joining friends at restaurants without eating. But that got to be uncomfortable and embarrassing. "People quickly figure out what is going on," Sparkes said. "My wife says she can see by the look in my eye, I don't want to be there because of the money. So why go?" Constraints of money spill on to becoming even bigger constraints in social life, multiplying the worry. Sparkes is worried that the longer the job search is stretched the further his friends will go and the less there will be the likelihood of receiving help from them. "It's like offering to help someone paint their house. You might go there a weekend or two... but when it stretches to seven months, it gets old," he said. "You have to be careful with how you feel about yourself. You have to stay positive, or people will subconsciously pull back." Sparkes however, is more fortunate than others and is hopeful about getting a job soon as two companies have shown interest in hiring him for some senior financial positions. For Charles, the veteran bank manager, thinks further aggravated for he also had to foot the medical bills for his adult son. Moreover, he has realized that his vast experience, from years of working in the bank, amounts to nothing and cannot be a substitute for a college degree, so he has commenced online business classes from Broward College. There were 750 people queued up to enter the Davie's Signature Grand event hall, waiting for the doors to open. They'd been waiting there since 8 in the morning. The free job fair opened at 10. By noon all the forms and other materials that Job News had laid out were picked up by the job hunters, even though there were still two more hours to go. The lines were so long that it was hard to tell where they began. Cassandra Weston waited her turn to hand her resume to an accounting firm, quietly praying that her business training would help her get a job. She had been employed for a long time with the Health Department in Broward County, a job she lost in September. She says that keeping up with her regular routines has become a luxury she can ill afford. "Right now, I don't turn on my air conditioner," the 52-year-old said. "I had money to buy gas. I ride my bike now." She says that these days she is forced to frequent free flea markets where she buys provisions for the week at much cheaper rates than when she would visit a regular shop, thrice a week. She says that for \$17, she can purchase fruits and vegetables for "a week's worth of fish stews and fresh juices." "I take care of myself now," she said. "Because I can't afford to go to the doctor." Long-term unemployment has long-term consequences that can leave mental and physical scars that can be difficult to mend. As can be gauged from the lives of Charles, Cassandra and Sparkes, the impact of unemployment extends well beyond the financial impact. They lose themselves and their social lives. They experience profound self-doubt, overwhelming feelings of sadness, anger, worry and hopelessness. Sybil Keane, PhD, a psychology and relationship expert for the Web site Just Answer says, that over time, it can produce self-destructive habits such as drinking, smoking, drug use, and relationship problems.