

# Coping with involuntary job loss



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Involuntary job loss is defined as someone losing their job due to the workplace closing or downsizing, being fired, or being made redundant. Involuntary loss comes with a great impact on the individual and family; although, it varies from person to person. The effect on the person and their family's well-being can range from developing mental disorders, adjustment disorders, changes in personality traits, and even suicide. A review and discussion of articles will further define the emotional impact of the loss. Furthermore, best-practice approaches for addressing the issues and strategies to promote healing will be identified.

### Type of Loss

Involuntary job loss significantly affects the well-being of the individuals who are concerned about their loss. Involuntary job loss is followed by other stressors such as financial troubles or family conflicts, job loss has a multitude of implications with potential to disrupt other important areas of life (Lorenz, Perkonig, & Maercker, 2018). Dealing with stressors can be much more difficult when the person who has experienced involuntary job loss is a woman income earner. A study focused on mothers' involuntary job loss and children's academic achievement confirms that the families in which women are income earners, their job loss is expected to affect the well-being of the family (Filiz, 2016). In the case of single mothers, there is no husband, significant other, or domestic partner to compensate for the lost wages affecting the well-being of the mother even more as there is no emotional support (Anger, Camehl, & Peter, 2017). Children's well-being may be affected emotionally and academically. The study focused on mother's involuntary job loss and children's academic achievement determined that

job displacement, followed by an up to 12-month unemployment spell, has a negative impact on both math and reading scores. Job displacement negatively impacts children's reading and math test scores in the short run (Filiz, 2016).

### Adjustment Disorder

Involuntary job loss can be detrimental to the person who lost the job and their family. One of the effects of involuntary loss is the development of Adjustment Disorder which is identified as behavioral symptoms in response to the loss and stressors related to the intensity of the loss (Lorenz, Perkonigg, & Maercker, 2018). Recurring stressors preoccupy the person causing additional distressing thoughts about the loss and its consequences potentially leading to sleep disturbances or having problems concentrating (Maercker, et al., 2013). A study published in the European Journal of Psychotraumatology reports that the prevalence of Adjustment Disorder has a marginally significant higher proportion for woman being diagnosed than men and women also displaying higher Adjustment Disorder symptoms than men (Lorenz, Perkonigg, & Maercker, 2018). Adjustment Disorder has been determined to be associated with perceived social support available to the person indicating a higher probability of Adjustment Disorder with higher perceived social support. It could be that a person suffering from job loss relies more on social contacts, therefore, perceive their social support as higher (Lorenz, Perkonigg, & Maercker, 2018).

### Changes in Personality Traits

Developing changes in personality traits have been proven to be a result of involuntary job loss. If personality traits are adversely affected by shocks during the working life, then it may explain long-term unemployment. A study published in the *Journal of Economic Psychology* analyzes the different measurements of personality traits over time by comparing individuals' "initial" personality traits to personality traits after job loss (Anger, Camehl, & Peter, 2017). Results of the study may not be accurate as unemployment status as well as other types of job loss may have originated internally, therefore, personality traits could have resulted from previous unemployment history. Reactions of individuals vary from case to case depending on the job loss, the level of education, and the overall shock that it had on the person. Highly educated individuals become more open about losing their jobs as they reach the reality of having to find a new job, which seems to be easier for them. However, individuals who are more open after losing their jobs have been determined to not be emotionally stable (Anger, Camehl, & Peter, 2017).

## Suicide

A more serious life-ending effect of involuntary job loss is mental health issues leading to suicide. Involuntary job loss has been proven to be a significant risk factor for suicide. A study examining the relationship between involuntary job loss and suicide or attempted suicide in young adults determined that most suicide deaths occurred among those aged 20 to 24 years and 25 to 29 years. The individuals who attempted suicide were comprised of those individuals ages 20 to 24 years and 30 to 34 years (Milner, et al., 2014). In a separate study, 17% of 286 males who died by

suicide and had lost their job took their lives within a month of job loss. The mean age at death was 41.9 years (Coope, et al., 2015).

### Best Practice Interventions

Coping with job loss is a process that changes over time and varies from individual to individual, a thorough understanding of how individuals cope with involuntary job loss is necessary to maximize the effectiveness of job loss interventions. A study focused on coping strategies following involuntary job loss utilizes problem-focused coping and emotion-focused coping strategies. Problem-focused coping is a strategy that changes stressful situations, or essentially, solves the problem so it no longer possesses a threat. Problem-focused coping is practiced by taking action, making a plan, and seeking out instrumental support to fix or resolve a stressful situation. Emotion-focused coping is described as efforts that do not aim to change a stressful situation, but instead attempts to manage or regulate one's emotions in response to the stressful situation. Emotion-focused coping consists of seeking emotional support or comfort, avoiding stressful situations, or reinterpreting a stressful situation positively. Findings from the study indicate that the role of problem-focused coping is effective when managing the impacts of involuntary job loss (Abebe & Welbourne, 2015).

Solove, Fisher, and Kraiger (2015) similarly utilize problem-focused coping and emotion-focused coping strategies in their study. Coping resources are also discussed in the content of this article becoming a common factor outlined for those individuals who distance themselves. Coping resources include social support, life satisfaction, financial resources, and self-esteem.

If an individual possesses these resources they are more likely to distance themselves from practicing coping strategies (Solove, Fisher, & Kraiger, 2015). Coping resources have been identified as a positive relationship to problem-focused coping if the resources are available. The availability of coping resources plays a significant role in the coping process for individuals. Individuals who are unemployed and lack self-esteem possess minimal faith in their capabilities to obtain reemployment, leading to emotion-focused coping activities that provide a form of escape; while individuals with ample self-esteem believe in their abilities to secure a new job, leading to problem focused activities directly focused on obtaining a new job (Solove, Fisher, & Kraiger, 2015).

Across the articles reviewed, problem-focused coping and emotion-focused coping seems to be the common factor; thus, being the most frequently used interventions when coping with involuntary job loss. Abebe and Welbourne (2015) identify one of the weaknesses of emotion-focused coping as lacking proactivity; making it less likely to lead to a successful resolution of a stressful situation. In contrast to problem-focused coping it does not lead to increased active job search. The strengths lie on problem-focused coping which puts more effort into job searching (Abebe & Welbourne, 2015). Hentz (2016) developed a study to learn how older men over the age 50 whose employment requires a four-year college degree cope adaptively with involuntary job loss. Findings of the study suggested that older men who cope adaptively demonstrate developmentally complex ways of meaning making; specifically, demonstrating higher levels of cognitive well-being that

pointed to more problem-focused behaviors further supporting its strengths (Hentz, 2016).

In conclusion, involuntary job loss is detrimental to individuals and their families as it comes with many stressors. Involuntary job loss can greatly affect the individual's well-being and multiple issues may develop such as adjustment disorder, changes in personality traits, financial struggles, and suicide. The two coping strategies identified to cope with involuntary job loss are emotion-focused coping and problem-focused coping. Emotion-focused coping does not attempt to change a stressful situation but instead attempts to manage and regulate one's emotions in response to the stressful situation. Whereas, problem-focused coping strategically changes stressful situations to essentially solve the problem so that it no longer possesses a threat. Problem-focused coping has been determined to be more beneficial when it comes to being resilient and moving forward to search for jobs. The coping strategies simply influence the rate and likelihood of reemployment.

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