



# Jobless in 'soul-destroying' lifestyle

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A SOUL-destroying search for work is how one person described unemployment in a survey to be released today by University College Dublin.

The nationwide survey, *The Experience of Unemployment in Ireland*, found physical health problems and frustrations with government systems are just as worrying for the unemployed as immediate financial problems.

Researchers worked with 70 people in 13 focus groups between February and May 2010, discussing 15 topics including budgeting, the lack of a daily routine, coping strategies, welfare payments and unemployment for older people.

Lead author Dr Liam Delaney said it was important to listen to people who were out of work.

"The sense of injustice was what leapt off the page for me. Researchers were coming in and saying people didn't want to talk about their emotions, they were focused on political decisions," he said.

Dr Delaney said people today were in a different situation from the long-term unemployed of the 1980s as they were coming from a background of sustained work.

One man described how frustrated he was doing courses designed for people with no professional skills. "[They tell you], 'You'll better yourself doing a course'. No, you don't. You go out of your tree."

A number of men said family relationships were affected. "I felt I was after invading her space because I was normally never in the house and she found that hard, difficult to deal with," one man said, referring to his partner.

Many women expressed sympathy for the situation of male workers, while many men said they found it difficult to express feelings of frustration, blaming a sense of shame or inadequacy.

Some older women said they found it difficult thinking about the family time on which they missed out for unsustainable jobs.

"I felt that I never had enough time with them and there's a little bitterness about that now that I'm redundant," one woman said.

Other people talked of finding

ways to fill the day, doing DIY or learning a new skill. "My morale has improved... I've changed my outlook on not expecting to find a job tomorrow and that has to be a long-term strategy," said one man.

Dr Delaney suggested policy-makers listen to the complaints made about the welfare system.

"We should be looking at whether that environment could be made more uplifting. I think there's too much emphasis on bringing people into the job centres," he said.

Many people discussed how difficult it was to move out of the welfare system without a full-time job. About the paperwork, one said: "If you got a couple of hours' work... they [social welfare staff] make a big thing... 10 hours' work would be no good because it would cause too much hassle to pay it through the books."

## BEING UNEMPLOYED IN THEIR OWN WORDS

■ When you are panicking like that, when you are overwhelmed with that kind of anxiety, you stop and you don't do anything... and then you're not eating properly and you're not exercising.

■ There's a policy here whereby, if you lose your job, 'Tough. We don't give a s\*\*\* about you'.

■ There was about 100 people in front of me and 100 people behind me and by the time I got to the counter I was practically abused by the person behind the counter, and it's just embarrassing and it's horrible... they don't make it easy

and that's not very helpful when you're not working. It doesn't have to be that hard.

■ People who have worked all their lives are being reduced to the level of beggars, you know - we're back to the Victorian idea of the deserving poor being looked after by the ladies.

■ Can you pick one of the 166 guys inside the Dáil now who's helping the people?

■ I found since I've been out of work, I felt sick and I had a cough and all and I said, 'Oh no, I'll leave it. I'm not

going to spend all that money going to the doctor'.

■ I'm having a hard time. For me to pay it in to the bank or in the post office... they insist on direct debit, and I'd much prefer to pay it off week by week. That's the way you operate if you are on minimum money.

■ It starts to rot, to eat away at you. You start to believe that this is the way it's going to be for the rest of your days.

■ I can't see hope and I feel all stressed out then. So you are trying to live in the day like.

