

# Unemployment changes your core personality, according to study

February 16 2015, by David Tripp

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The psychological damage caused by unemployment is greater than previously thought, according to a study led by researchers at the University of Stirling.

Stirling's behavioural scientists have found that [unemployment](#), well-known to cause substantial drops in personal wellbeing, can also cause

large changes to a person's core personality.

Personality is typically considered stable across time but the researchers found that the experience of unemployment led to reduced levels of conscientiousness, agreeableness, and openness; signifying that individuals lose motivation, become less considerate and sympathetic, and less curious about the world around them. These changes were greater the longer an individual spent unemployed.

Lead researcher Dr Christopher Boyce, from the University of Stirling's Behavioural Science Centre, said: "The results challenge the idea that our personalities are 'fixed' and show that the effects of external factors such as unemployment can have large impacts on our basic personality."

Participants in the study completed [personality tests](#) at two time-points, four years apart. All participants were employed at the time of the first test. At the time of the second test, they had either remained in employment, been unemployed for one to four years, or were re-employed after a period of unemployment.

The results showed that compared with those who had remained in employment unemployed people experienced significant patterns of change in their agreeableness, conscientiousness and openness. Re-employed individuals experienced limited change.

The study suggests that the effect of unemployment across society is more than just an economic concern. The unemployed may be unfairly stigmatised as a result of unavoidable personality change, potentially creating a downward cycle of difficulty in the labour market. Public policy therefore has a key role to play in preventing adverse personality change in society through both lower unemployment rates and offering greater support for the unemployed.

Dr Boyce said: "A high national [unemployment rate](#) may have significant implications across society. For example, high unemployment may hinder the development of desirable social and economic behaviours, such as participation in social activities and better health behaviours.

"Policies to reduce unemployment are therefore vital not only to protect the economy but also to enable positive personality growth in individuals."

Provided by University of Stirling

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