



# Hardest Times: The Trauma of Long Term Unemployment

*Thomas J. Cottle*

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Against the backdrop of a robust economy, hundreds of thousands of people in this country remain out of work for long periods of time, causing economic and psychological hardships for entire families. *Hardest Times* examines in depth what happens to men, and to their families, when they remain out of work for longer than six months, a period the government designates as long term unemployment. Cottle examines long term unemployment as a traumatic event, which creates in those who experience it conditions resembling symptoms of loss and post-trauma. Through the words of men who have experienced long term unemployment, he demonstrates that work is crucial to the formation of a man's identity, and that without work, many men often find no purpose for living. The in-depth studies that Cottle undertook reveal here why some men abandon their families or, in some instances, are driven to commit murder or suicide in the face of lingering unemployment. These often heart wrenching stories encourage readers to consider the implications of long term unemployment for the men who experience it, the families who endure it, and the society that tolerates it.

Cottle's approach demonstrates that unemployment cannot be examined strictly in statistical terms, but that ultimately it must be explored in human terms, for it affects both the unemployed worker and his family. Instead of treating long term unemployment as simply another social problem, Cottle argues that it must be treated as a serious, often life-threatening, disorder, whose cure is clearly discernible. By reading the words of these men, the reader will understand how, even in this time of shifting gender roles, men in large measure still define themselves by the work they do, rather than the relationships that they cultivate. This unique approach to the problem of long term unemployment gives a human face to the problem and encourages readers to rethink the nature of working and not working and its special importance to men.

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