

The Impact of Unemployment on Couple Relationships



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Who we are

We are a voluntary sector organisation with a national and international reputation as a specialist centre of excellence for advanced study, training and clinical practice providing support to the mental health and family support field.

TCCR was founded in 1948 and has engaged for 60 years in Research, Training and Clinical Services. Our approach is informed by psychodynamic thinking and the belief that relationships are influenced by conscious and unconscious forces

TCCR Services

Our work aims to:

- Improve the quality of adult couple relationships
- Prevent family breakdown
- Enhance the lives of children

Clinical Services

- Parenting Together Service
- The Divorce and Separation Unit
- Relationship Counselling
- Psychosexual Therapy
- Couple Psychotherapy

We provide a range of services that:

Training

- TCCR runs the UK's first Professional Doctorate in Couple Psychoanalytic Psychotherapy and Masters in the Psychoanalytic Study of the Couple Relationship. TCCR also runs a Post Graduate Diploma in Psychodynamic Couple Counselling.
- Practitioner training and CPD.
- Workforce development programmes for related professionals.
- Consultancy and supervision to a range of professions (health, legal, mediators etc).

Our Basic Assumptions & Method

1. The “Couple Relationship” is the patient.
2. The focus of the therapy is on the conscious and unconscious dynamics manifest in the relationship between partners and in relation to the therapist.
3. We look for 3 sources of information:
 - a) By listening to what each partner tells us about the relationship.
 - b) By observing the interaction between the partners.
 - c) By thinking about our own emotional experience of the individuals and of the couple.

Key Concepts

The Unconscious Couple Fit:

- Why are these partners together?
- Why have they chosen each other?
- Do they have a similar history which somehow fits together?
- Do they have different histories which also fit together?

The couple fit is not necessarily conscious.

Key Concepts

The Couple as a projective system:

- Both partners try to rid themselves of their unbearable experiences by projecting them into the other.
- This is an unconscious process based on their past difficult experiences and unconscious phantasies.
- Each partner does this, then unconsciously recognises these unwanted, disowned parts of themselves in the other.

Key Concepts

The Shared Inner World

- How have the parents impacted one another's internal world?
- What are the shared anxieties that are hard to bear or know about?
- What is the quality and flavour of their internal world? Do they have a “good internal couple” or a more destructive one inhibiting their mind?

Key Concepts

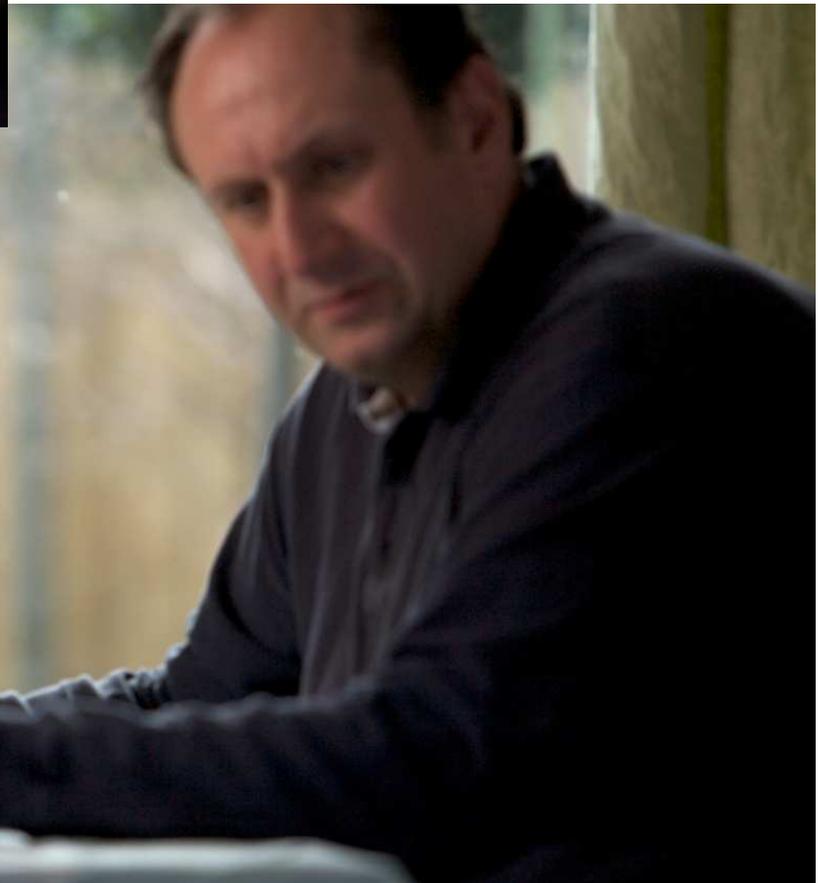
The Couple Container

- The couple relationship can be thought of as a “psychological container” of the couple’s shared and individual experiences.
- The healthy couple provides a psychological space for itself within which partners can process and “contain” the emotional experiences arising from their relating to one another and their environment.

To summarise...

- The patient is the relationship.
- Focus on both conscious and unconscious communication.
- Think about the couple's shared inner world and unconscious phantasies.
- Supporting the development of the “couple container”.

The Impact of unemployment



The Impact of Unemployment could manifest through:

- Depressive symptoms
- Illness
- Marital/relational tensions
- Change in the sexual relationship in the couple
- “Looking out” of the relationship or affairs
- Anger and aggression
- Increased drinking, drug use or other compulsive behaviours
- Criminal activity
- Children ‘acting out’ at school

The Latent Functions of Work

Work in its most benign form provides:

- Financial security and ability to plan ahead – building a future for self, for family and the next generation.
- Status within the family and within society.
- Support for one's sense of personal identity.
- Affirmation and recognition contributing to feelings of self-worth.
- An outlet for creativity and self-expression.

The Latent Functions of Work

- Signifies the end of economic dependency and marks the transition into adulthood.
- A space away from the domestic setting where shared experience and gender affirmation are possible.
- “a sublimation (diversion) of primitive impulses into socially acceptable form”
(Janet Mattinson,).
- The provision of structure for the day and an antidote to boredom and restlessness.

The Impact of Job Loss

For many the shock of loss of work and continued unemployment exposed immaturities or problems in their (the couple's) way of relating which previously, with the help of work, an adequate or near adequate income, a structured day and means of distancing the partners for 8 hours a day for 5 days a week, had been contained.

Janet Mattinson, 1988

The Impact of Job Loss

- An inability to grieve signals a weak ego and the belief that experiencing or processing painful feelings can destroy us.
- A 'domino effect' where past losses are amplified by the current painful feelings, can result in severe physical symptoms, breakdown or impaired functioning.
- The choice of work reflects psychological needs and thus unemployment often has important unconscious symbolic value.

Unconscious Dynamics

- Mattison discovered that the reluctance of the unemployed to admit to their predicament relates to the intensity of shame felt with regards to job loss.
- Reluctance impairs the grieving and recovery processes on a personal and couple level.
- Guilt, envy and shame are invariably present in the unemployed, their family and the system around them.

Unconscious Dynamics: Issues for practitioners

One of Janet Mattinson's primary findings in her research into unemployment the of 1980's was that most people do not want to know about the reality of the adverse effects of unemployment on others. Counsellors, therapists and other social care professionals are not exempt from this desire not to know!

Impact on Practitioners

It is a very remarkable thing that the unconscious of one human being can react upon that of another without passing through the conscious....

Freud, 1915

Mattinson concluded that:

- Unconscious processes between client and practitioner are perhaps at their strongest around issues of unemployment.
- Clients project and thus communicate difficult feelings.
- Practitioners seemed to unconsciously feel responsible for their client's loss of job.

Unconscious Dynamics

- Guilt, envy and shame simply put: the practitioner is in a job, their client is not.
- Envy is a difficult feeling for anyone to manage, but so too is being envied.
- Practitioner may envy the unemployed client who may receive unemployment benefit, may not need to work and has spare time!

Unconscious Dynamics

- Wider Societal Blindness: The practitioner is victim to the wider societal blindness towards the adverse effects of unemployment.
- Denial of mourning: Clients, unlikely to have gone through the painful mourning process will tend to try and minimise the effects of job loss. The practitioner may well be pulled into this and collude with their clients.
- Helplessness: The practitioner is unable to magically provide what their clients needs, namely a job.

The Impact of Job Loss

- They ended up at the receiving end of their clients' unvoiced fury against society at large
- Feelings associated with past early deprivations, deep rooted feelings of anger, resentment and mistrust, which can find themselves communicated in the transference relationship

'We believe that practitioners are unduly influenced by their unemployed clients and the defensive systems which they are invited to join, because of their feelings about their own employment.' Janet Mattinson (1988)

The Impact of Job Loss

- In the current economic climate unemployment or under employment may be an issue for the practitioner as well.
- Practitioners often find it difficult to tolerate the feelings associated with unemployment and join with their clients in not thinking about the impact of job loss confirming the client's sense of helplessness.
- Recognition of such processes is vital to allow the emergence of creativity.

Training Considerations

- How do we change the societal 'Blindness'?
- How do we sensitise practitioners to the effects of unemployment
- How do we reach all those that might not recognize that the symptoms in one individual are a sign a family struggling (Teachers, Doctors, Social workers, probation officers, counsellors, psychologists, psychiatrists.....)
- Training? What kind of training and who will pay for it?

Training Considerations

Thank You

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