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Jeanna Bryner
Senior Writer
[LiveScience.com](#)
Mon Sep 1, 8:46 AM ET

Layoffs can turn social butterflies into near hermits who shun such outlets as book clubs and even church groups, finds a new study.

Workers who experienced just one layoff or involuntary loss of a job were 35 percent less likely to be involved in their communities than their always-employed counterparts, according to the survey that will be published in the September issue of the journal Social Forces.

The researchers suggest the reason could come down to tit for tat, or an attitude of "you don't scratch my back, why should I *scratch yours?*"

"Social engagement often involves an element of social trust and a sense that things are reciprocal - that you give some support if you get some support, and you benefit from society if society benefits from you," said lead researcher Jennie Brand, a sociologist at UCLA. "When workers are displaced, the tendency is to feel as though the social contract has been violated, and we found that they are less likely to reciprocate."

Dirt on downsizing

The results were based on data on nearly 4,400 participants in the Wisconsin Longitudinal Study, which has tracked a group of 1957 Wisconsin high school graduates for more than 45 years. Born between 1939 and 1940, the participants are of an American age group that is inclined to participate in community and social groups, the researchers say.

Of the six forms of involvement, youth and community groups experienced the strongest exodus by displaced workers followed by [church and church groups](#), charitable organizations and leisurely activities. Professional and political groups remained just as popular on average in displaced and non-displaced workers.

"Displaced workers may be more likely to keep up with professional groups than other groups because they're trying to make up for lost ground with respect to their careers," Brand said.

Workers who got flung out of their jobs during their peak earning years, between the ages of 35 and 53, were the most likely to withdraw from the [social buzz](#) throughout their lives. Employees who got the boot between 53 and 64 years of age, at the tail end of their careers, were just as likely to participate in social and community groups as their non-displaced

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counterparts.

"Being laid off doesn't appear to be as socially damaging for older workers as younger ones," Brand said. "The shame factor of downsizing your lifestyle just isn't there, because your peers may be downsizing as well and you can play off your displacement as an early retirement even though it may be forced retirement."

Double whammy

The latest findings have considerable ramifications, Brand said.



"Whether citizens participate is important for the effective functioning of neighborhoods, schools, communities and democracies," Brand said.

In addition, such withdrawals from society can cause a vicious cycle of unemployment. "If workers withdraw socially after being laid off, then they're experiencing double-jeopardy," Brand said. "They're losing their jobs, and then they're not participating in society, so they're not keeping up with social contacts that might help them find a new job."

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