

## Men hit harder by job losses

Unemployment is substantially higher among Michigan men than among women - a turnabout caused by devastating job losses in the state's critical manufacturing sector.

In 2000, when Michigan's economy was more or less stable, women's jobs were in greater jeopardy. That's normally the way the job market plays out, economists say.

But by 2009, 433,000 Michigan jobs in manufacturing industries, long dominated by men, had disappeared.

The disparity between the genders raises an epic, unanswered question, said Joyce Jacobsen, an economics professor at Wesleyan University in Middletown, Conn.: "What is the place for men in the 21st century?"

"Men traditionally have had these very narrow roles and there are wholesale shifts going on in the economy," said Jacobsen, who has studied the role of gender in employment trends.

"The major growth in jobs is in health care and schools, which are still female dominant."

The numbers show the trend. In 2000, 3.9 percent of Michigan's men were jobless, compared to 4.1 percent of its women. By 2005, men had a slightly higher jobless rate - 6.9 percent compared to women's 6.3 percent.

By 2008, the gap widened considerably: 9.1 percent for men, compared to 7.4 percent, the most recent year available for gender comparison.

Nationally, the disparity between male and female unemployment is less.

While the state's economy is diversifying, Michigan men aren't fully embracing it.

Last year's enrollment at University of Michigan's School of Nursing, for example, was 91 percent female. At Eastern Michigan University's College of Education, enrollment is 79 percent female.

Heidi Shierholz, economist for Economic Policy Institute, a Washington think tank, said prospects will improve for men in manufacturing.

"Part of what is going is a business cycle and there will be hiring again in manufacturing," she said. "But it won't change the long-term trend of women making huge gains in the labor force, which dates back to the '80s."

Loss goes beyond earnings

Sometimes, the funk for Keith Polek begins when he looks in the mirror in the morning.

"I'm used to ... getting geared up in my head, of all the things I have to do," said Polek, who at 48 is out of a job for the first time in his adult life.

"You know, almost like a ball game you got to win. But now I look at myself and ask, 'What am I going to do today?'"

Occasionally, the Clinton Township mechanical engineer says, "I feel like the wind is coming out of me. Now, as the months pile up, the question is starting to become 'Who are you?'"

Polek, a former military contractor who at this time last year was pulling down an annual salary of \$100,000, is a case study in how the genders rise and fall with the economy.

"I just can't imagine seeing a great deal of job growth in that field these days," he said.

Nowadays, he spends a lot of his time at Michigan Works!, the state agency that works with the unemployed, and in coping sessions like the "Men in Transition" classes at Oakland University or the "Living with Less" course at Macomb County's Michigan State University Extension Center.

"You just hear 'no' a lot and learn what you can't do," he said. "You're too overqualified to be a cable television installer and underqualified to be a biomedical engineer."

Breadwinners no more

The men at the Michigan Works! office in Clinton Township say one of the toughest challenges is accepting that they no longer are the family breadwinner.

"It's the basic role every man wants to fulfill. And when you having trouble doing that, well, that's very serious," said Roger Jackson, 61.

Jackson was a tool and die maker - a job once so secure that he had to fend off offers.

But the tool and die industry has been decimated by technological change and foreign competition. About 61 percent of Michigan's tool and die jobs have been wiped out in the past decade. Jackson went back to school to become an accountant - but two years ago, he was laid off.

"It's my age. In this economy, the few jobs there are, they can hire many people. I don't think a 61-year-old is going to be their first choice," he said.

About 15 years ago, his wife, Carolyn, took a job as a sales clerk at J.C. Penney to help pay the college costs for their two children. It was supposed to be temporary. She's grateful she still has it.

"Every day, I can see it's a battle for him. I tell him not to try to get so angry and I try to prod him to make sure he's keeping himself busy so it will keep his spirits up," Carolyn Jackson said.

Patricia "Patty" Stiles, a 37-year-old office manager in Mount Clemens, knows that battle, too.

Her husband, Jack, lost his job nearly a year ago when the auto transport company where he worked for a decade went out of business. He was a warehouse manager, she said. Jack declined to be interviewed.

"He was always grouchy and complaining because he had too much to do. But now it's a moodiness that's different. He's afraid and he doesn't want to show it," Stiles said.

Not wanting to show much emotion is a theme seen often by Gerald Knesek. Knesek was a human resources manager at General Motors Co. and he saw the "right-sizing" of hundreds of men.

"It's a core loss of identity; of self-esteem," Knesek said, who has a doctorate in counseling. "Most men have been told from the time they were little kids they have to take care of things, they have to be the breadwinner. You take that away and it's a deep-seated sense of rejection." Knesek, 58, took an early retirement almost a year ago and started the "Men in Transition" sessions at OU, designed for men who have been laid off.

Wives and family often are the "last person" with whom they want to share their vulnerability, Knesek said. "They are the ones they need to protect."

Stiles says that while the steep drop in family income hangs over them, what she and her husband argue about are more mundane daily matters.

"He's still not doing the stuff around the house I want him to do, like cook dinner most of the time," Stiles said. "I know it kills him because he's trying, but neither of us know what to do to make it better right now.

"We're both trying to figure out what's the best way for us to go forward."