Stephen K. Wegren, David J. O'Brien and Valeri V. Patsiokovski

Abstract

This article focuses on unemployment in rural Russia. While a large amount of attention has been given to socio-economic consequences of the market transition and Russia's unemployment program in general, absent in the scholarly literature are detailed analyses about the rural unemployed. Our intent is to further understanding of the attitudes and behaviors of rural households which have an unemployed member, and of rural individuals themselves. The paper is organized around two main questions: how have the rural unemployed fared during reform; and how have the rural unemployed adapted during reform?

In our survey, 8% of our sample responded that they were unemployed, of whom 22% were aged 18-29, another one-third was aged 30-39, and one-third was aged 40-49. The unemployed cohort is on the whole much younger: the unemployed have a mean age of 37, while the employed have a mean age of 53. Female unemployment dominates in our survey data, accounting for 62.5% of those who are unemployed. Our data also add additional detail to the portrait of the rural unemployed. More than 95% of the unemployed are married. Households with at least one unemployed person have higher levels of education than households where no one is unemployed. In household with at least one unemployed person, the mean educational level of the husband is 11.06 years and the wife's is 11.37, compared with 9.99 for husbands and 9.84 for wives in households with no one unemployed. Finally, the mean size of a household with at least one member unemployed is 3.5 persons, while a household with no one unemployed is 3.0 persons, which is a significant demographic difference.

Our data lead to the following conclusions:

(1) Households with an unemployed member are not severely disadvantaged with regard to productive capital – land, animals, and equipment.

(2) At the same time, households with an unemployed member do not take advantage of their "surplus" labor and do not obtain higher levels of productive capital.
(3) Households with an unemployed member produce less food, consume higher percentages of their household production, and sell less of their household production.

(4) Satisfaction levels of unemployed persons are essentially equal to or better than that of employed persons.

(5) Unemployed persons receive slightly less economic assistance from other family members, but more from friends and neighbors. Neither cohort receives significant assistance from large farms.

(6) Unemployed persons have higher participation rates in the ceremonies of family members, friends and neighbors, and the village than do employed persons.