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Unemployed More Likely to Go Shopping Than Look for a Job

By Ali Meyer

Unemployed Americans are more likely to shop for things other than food and gas than to look for a new job on an average day, according to data from the Bureau of Labor Statistics.

Only 18 percent of unemployed Americans spent time searching or interviewing for a job on an average day, while 41.1 percent shopped online, in store, or by phone. About one in five unemployed Americans, or 21.2 percent, went shopping for items other than food and gas.

Nearly all of the unemployed, or 96.6 percent, socialized, relaxed, or took part in leisure activities, and 83 percent watched television and movies on an average day. Twenty-five percent of unemployed Americans played sports, exercised, or took part in recreation activities, while 19 percent took part in education, which may have included taking classes for a degree.

Unemployed individuals are defined as those who are jobless, available for work, and actively looking for a job, but the job hunt may not be the most time-consuming activity unemployed Americans take part in on an average day. They may not have looked for a job at all.

The bureau's American Time Use Survey interviews individuals about how they spent their time on the previous day, asking questions about where they were and who they were with. "The goal of the survey is to measure how people divide their time among life's activities," the bureau states.

Unemployed Americans from the most recent survey are less likely to look for a job and more likely to shop on an average day than respondents from the previous survey. The most recent data averages responses from the years 2011 to 2015. The previous year's data, which averages responses from 2010 to 2015, shows that 18.2 percent of unemployed Americans searched or interviewed for a job while 40.8 percent went shopping in store, by phone, or online.

The bureau also calculates how many hours per day that unemployed individuals participate in these activities. According to the bureau, on an average day unemployed Americans spent 2.58 hours searching for a job, 5.92 hours socializing and relaxing, 3.81 hours watching TV and movies, 2.02 hours playing sports and exercising, and 1.18 hours shopping for items other than food and gas.

"The fact that unemployed people choose leisure over job hunting suggests the ongoing economic malaise has discouraged them from even looking for a job, let alone landing one," said Alfredo Ortiz, president and CEO of the Job Creators Network, a nonpartisan organization.

"In order to pull these people back into the job market and raise the country's generationally low labor force participation rate, policymakers must reduce tax, regulation, and credit barriers that prevent small businesses from creating jobs," Ortiz said.