Beyond the Pink Slip: Mental Health Challenges Among Displaced IT Workers in India

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Abstract. The case explores and undertakes the journey of pink slips, technological disruption, and the silence around mental health through the experiences of Karan. The events are drawn from real-life situations and have been adapted to protect the identity of the individual. The case follows Karan Jadhav, a mid-level IT professional working in Bengaluru. He tries to navigate his life after being laid off during a strategic downsizing at a Multinational Company (MNC) where he has been working for more than 10 years. Karan finds himself battling with anxiety over unpaid bills and a constant dread of not finding a job. In a country such as India, the job is associated with a sense of identity, purpose, self-esteem, self-efficacy, and social acceptance and respect. Karan's story reflects the human cost of technological disruption, lack of social and emotional support around mental health, and policy gaps that leave the displaced professionals vulnerable and with poor to no support. Designed for courses in Organizational Behaviour, HRM, or Public Policy, it invites learners to explore mental health inclusion, workplace transitions, and the complex socio-economic and emotional realities of job loss.

Keywords: job displacement, technological disruption, emotional well-being, organizational behaviour.

1. Introduction

Karan, as he sits on his balcony at 9:00 A.M., gazing at vehicles going in and out of residential areas in a rush to reach the office on time. This was his routine for the last 10 years, but the last 15 days have been different. He sits on his balcony, looking at moving cars and at his flickering laptop screen. Browsing through job portals and checking his email for any interested employers, unfortunately, the job

alerts neither make him interested nor hopeful. He was 25 years old when he came to Bangalore for his first job in a reputed MNC. His family and friends from Solapur were very proud and happy of his achievement. Now, after losing the job, he is scared, ashamed, and has lost confidence to call them and share his grief. Now, as a 35-year-old software professional, he has to find his place again in the city. His wife Anjali, though professionally qualified, has chosen to be a home-maker for the upbringing of their 5-year-old daughter Kanak.

Karan dreaded calls from family and friends and avoided conversations with neighbours. His wife, Anjali, though supportive, has found it challenging to connect with him and can sense the widening of the emotional gap, as he keeps things to himself and rarely speaks about anything. Their daughter, Kanak, though happy at first to have her father more at home, is now perplexed to see him at home all day. She complains about Karan not playing with her anymore, always irritated and rarely smiling or helping her with her homework or any activity. Karan, who hails from a middle-class suburban town, has always frowned upon the concept or need for mental well-being. When Anjali suggested meeting a therapist to unknot the emotional ties and help him sail through the phase, she was met with an aggressive and dismissive stare, "I am not mad yet!"

2. Mental Health and Stigma

This quiet, despair, anger, and blunt refusal by Karan is a deep-rooted cultural reality of India. Karan, like many Indian men, was raised to believe that managing family finances is primarily their responsibility, and the role of the wife is to manage the home and children.   Showing vulnerability is typically a woman's behaviour, and men are supposed to be a stronger gender, and showing any weakness is unacceptable (Athanasiadis et al., 2025; Deslauriers & Hoebanx, 2025). A Deloitte India (2024) report found that 68% of mid-career professionals in IT experience mental distress after layoffs, yet fewer than 12% seek help. Job loss is associated with shame, which magnifies the emotional toll and shatters the concept of self-identity, especially among men (Jefferys, 2024). Studies suggest that about 80% of Indians with mental health issues are not likely to seek help due to the taboo associated with this (PTI, 2023). The stigma surrounding mental health in India, which is very real, is much stronger in the case of men (Jha, 2025).

3. Background and Context

India's IT industry, long regarded as the backbone of global outsourcing, currently employs over 5 million professionals (NASSCOM, 2023). It has been a major driver of national economic growth and a vehicle for individual upward mobility. However, this once-stable sector is undergoing dramatic change.