



PSYCHOLOGICAL DISTRESS EXPERIENCED BY RETRENCHED WORKERS

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ABSTRACT: *The retrenched workers are prone to psychological distress and may find it difficult to mentally adjust in an environment where job opportunities are shrinking. It is essential for organisations to consider mental health priority for the retrenched workers. They need to be mentally assisted to deal with the grief of employment loss. Early interventions may result in quick recovery and building of the lost hope and confidence. The knowledge of mental health concerns and symptoms may serve as guidelines for decision making essential for building resilience strategies.*

KEYWORDS: Psychological Distress, Retrenched Workers, Job, Employment Loss

INTRODUCTION

It is essential for the retrenched workers to be aware of early signs and symptoms of maladaptive behaviour and thinking patterns. This could help them to institute early protective measures essential for resilience-enhancement. Early intervention may result in quick recovery and restoration of the lost internal and external locus of control (Membride, 2016; Corrigan & Watson, 2018; Dutta, 2016). The knowledge of mental health concerns and symptoms may serve as guidelines for decision making essential for building resilience strategies. Symptoms of psychological distress may have different meanings among individuals (Bartels, Cardinas, Daliwal, & Alegría, 2012). This implies that the perceived psychological distress can be interpreted differently by the retrenched workers. The cultural misconceptions on mood and behaviour disturbances can trigger segregation, discrimination and labelling of the retrenched workers by community members. Distressed retrenched workers sometimes construe themselves as rebuffed by the community (Koffie, 2016; Hansen, 2009).

The retrenched workers are sometimes subjected to mind blindness where they become unaware of the mental states of the self and others. They may undergo a period of sense breaking characterised by discontenting the self in relation to the ideal self. They experience cognitive dissonance (Dambrun & Ricard, 2011). The depressed mood, low self-esteem, loss of internal and external locus of control is related to loss of employment (Zawawi & Hamaideh 2009; Hair, Renaud & Ramsay, 2006). Those who felt segregated may exaggerate the distress to draw the attention and sympathy of their colleagues, and to get more help, care and love (Nyqvist & Forsman, 2013; Elizabeth, Sarah, Susan, Malspeis & Nancy, 2015).

The adversity created by the loss of employment can instil fear (Yoon, 2017; Seifert, 2013). This implies that the retrenched workers may have a sense of uncertainty of life and relinquish control over thinking processes. Isolated individuals not having social



connectedness ties find it difficult to build resilience. The retrenched individuals sometimes have a tendency of blaming others for their own mistakes and denying any responsibility for their problems (Wilkins, 2014; Riggio, 2015; Cherry, 2017). Retrenched workers experience the loss of prestige and undermining of own reputation (Danaher, Cook, Danaher, Coombes & Danaher, 2013; Mugodzwa, 2017). A sense of community and affiliation is lost, thereby aggravating psychological distress. This may contribute to the eminent development of identity crisis. A possible feeling of insecurity can contribute to irrational fear and exacerbate the psychological distress. The painful feelings, anger, fear and disappointment associated with employment loss can be collectively disputed to enhance resilience (David, 2015; Warrell, 2012; Lorman, 2017; Swartz, 2018). The retrenched workers may regard employment as a salient source of identity, self-esteem and self-efficacy.

Psychologically depressed retrenched workers sometimes struggle to concentrate and find it difficult to execute daily routine tasks. Low cognitive social capital at an individual level is significantly associated with higher level of psychological distress (Muckenhuber, Pollak, Stein, & Dorner, 2016; Uphoff, Pickkett, Cabieses, Small, & Write, 2013; Benjamin, 2011). This entails that the distressed retrenched workers can have limited mental capacity to execute daily life tasks. They may have lack of motivation to actively resolve the perceived psychological distress. This can contribute to disillusionment and subsequent failure to fulfil the expected obligations.

The psychological distress experienced by the retrenched workers should not be used as an excuse for making decisions for them (Hegde & Ellajosyula, 2016; Lamb, 2014; Frank, 2011). Through transference, the individuals can may manipulate or treat their colleagues harshly with no remorse. The enhancement of resilience should include the development of mindfulness among the retrenched workers. The ability to control emotions can strengthen the interpersonal relationships. Those who volunteer to be retrenched are likely to have less distress than those who are unceremoniously discharged from work (Lauscher & Vellem, 2011; Kably, 2016; Roback, 2000).

The retrenched workers should have the ability to recognise and understand their emotional behaviour. They need to monitor own feelings and understand others' feelings (Molenberghs, 2017). The regularisation of emotions may assist the retrenched workers to reduce the painful internal tensions and contribute to resilience-enhancement. Emotional control influences a person's ability to cope with the psychological distress. The need to observe self-control norms may become the benchmark for dealing with employment loss grief. Retrenched workers need to be acknowledged and accepted by others. They need to acquire the knowledge, attitudes and skills to recognise and manage their emotions, demonstrate care and concern for others, establish positive relationships, make responsible decisions, and handle challenging situations constructively. The retrenched workers may, however, have the sense of solidarity, and console each other as they deal with the grief of employment loss. Masiello et al. (2015) argue that emotional commitment leads to over-embedded and non-calculative thinking patterns which thwart resilience-enhancement. Neergaard et al. (2005) refute the notion by arguing that a clear comprehension of behaviour patterns inculcates a sense of unity and harmony essential for resilience-enhancement. Developing a sense of optimism and exercising compassion can assist to regularise emotions.



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