

Silent Survival: Financial And Emotional Trauma Among Lower Middle-Class Men in India – An Auto-Ethnographic Study

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ABSTRACT

This research paper examines the lived reality of lower middle-class men in India who face prolonged financial instability, emotional suppression, family responsibility, and social comparison. Using an auto-ethnographic and qualitative approach, the study explores how continuous economic pressure, lack of institutional support, and cultural expectations of masculinity lead to emotional exhaustion, loss of personal aspirations, and identity conflict. The paper highlights how such men prioritize family survival over personal well-being, often remaining psychologically invisible within both society and academic discourse. The study concludes by emphasizing the need for recognizing male emotional vulnerability and developing accessible mental health and socio-economic support systems.

Keywords: Lower Middle Class, Financial Trauma, Emotional Suppression, Masculinity, Mental Health, Family Responsibility

1. INTRODUCTION

In Indian society, men are traditionally expected to function as primary economic providers, emotional stabilizers, and symbols of resilience. These expectations become significantly heavier for men belonging to the lower middle class, where financial security is fragile and social mobility is limited. Unlike economically stable groups, lower middle-class men rarely possess financial buffers, professional guidance, or emotional support systems. This paper seeks to explore how long-term financial stress combined with emotional suppression affects mental well-being, aspirations, and family relationships.

2. STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Despite their central role in sustaining families, lower middle-class men often experience:

- Persistent financial anxiety
- Emotional isolation
- Guilt toward parents and spouse
- Loss of dreams and self-identity

These struggles remain largely unrecognized in academic research, which tends to focus on women, youth, or economically marginalized extremes, leaving lower middle-class male experiences underexplored.

3. OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

- To analyze the emotional impact of prolonged financial stress on lower middle-class men
- To examine the effects of emotional suppression on mental health
- To understand the relationship between family responsibility and self-blame
- To explore the gradual loss of personal aspirations
- To suggest possible social and psychological interventions

4. REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Existing research in sociology and psychology suggests a strong link between economic instability and mental health challenges such as anxiety and depression. Studies on masculinity indicate that men are often discouraged from expressing emotional vulnerability due to cultural norms.

However, most literature focuses on women or unemployed youth, while adult lower middle-class men—who silently sustain families—remain academically invisible. This study attempts to bridge that gap through lived-experience analysis.

5. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

- **Research Design:** Qualitative
- **Approach:** Auto-ethnographic and descriptive
- **Data Source:** Author's lived experiences supported by social observation
- **Method of Analysis:** Thematic and analytical interpretation

The research is original in nature and does not rely on copied narratives or secondary textual reproduction.

6. ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

6.1 Financial Trauma

Limited income combined with high responsibility creates constant psychological pressure. Financial insecurity forces individuals into survival mode, reducing long-term planning and personal development.

6.2 Emotional Suppression

Cultural expectations discourage men from expressing vulnerability. Emotional pain is internalized, leading to mental fatigue, numbness, and chronic stress.

6.3 Loss of Aspirations

Continuous struggle results in the gradual disappearance of personal goals, hobbies, and self-care, as family survival becomes the sole priority.

6.4 Guilt Toward Parents

The inability to provide parents with comfort and social respect comparable to other families generates deep emotional guilt, even when the individual has made sincere efforts.

6.5 Marital and Future Responsibility

Responsibility toward spouse and unborn child provides moral strength but also intensifies anxiety, particularly when financial and emotional resources are limited.

7. FINDINGS

- Lower middle-class men often remain in prolonged survival mode
- Emotional trauma is as damaging as financial hardship
- Social comparison increases self-blame and dissatisfaction
- Personal happiness is consistently postponed
- Mental health needs of men remain largely unaddressed

8. CONCLUSION

The study concludes that lower middle-class men in India function as silent survivors. Their sacrifices sustain families but come at the cost of emotional well-being and identity erosion. Recognizing male emotional vulnerability is essential not only for individual mental health but also for healthier family and social structures.

9. SUGGESTIONS / WAY FORWARD

- Affordable and stigma-free mental health services for men
- Family-level emotional communication and support
- Career guidance for first-generation learners
- Social acknowledgment of invisible male sacrifices

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