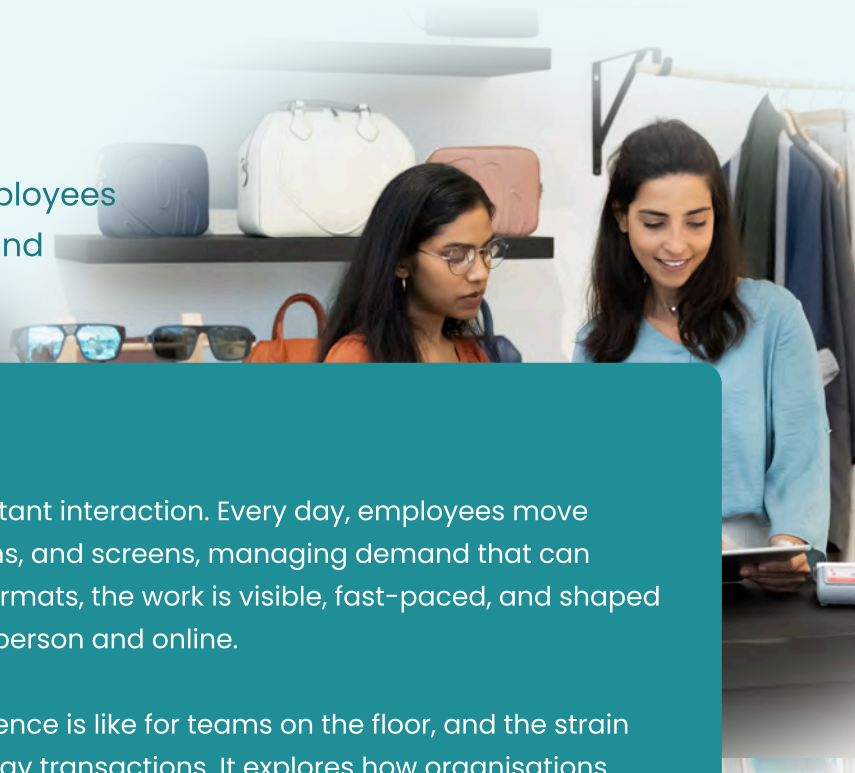


Rebuilding Resilience on the Retail Floor

A case study on supporting retail employees managing sales targets, long shifts, and customer demands in India



Summary

India's retail industry is built around constant interaction. Every day, employees move between customers, counters, stockrooms, and screens, managing demand that can change by the hour. Across stores and formats, the work is visible, fast-paced, and shaped by expectations that keep rising, both in person and online.

This case study looks at what that experience is like for teams on the floor, and the strain that often stays unspoken behind everyday transactions. It explores how organisations integrated mental health support into the workday, and the measurable changes in employee wellbeing, utilisation, and retention.

Inside the Everyday Reality of Retail

Retail doesn't start on the shop floor. It starts with people walking in with different needs, moods, and expectations, all at once.

Spend a few minutes inside any store and the rhythm becomes clear. There is no fixed pace. A quiet afternoon can turn into a rush within minutes. Even today, close to 80% of retail transactions globally still happen in physical stores. Which means the experience depends heavily on frontline teams who are constantly responding, adjusting, and staying present with customers.

At the same time, retail is no longer just physical.

E-commerce now makes up a significant and growing share of how people shop. A product might be discovered on an app, checked in-store, and purchased later through a marketplace. For employees, this changes the nature of the job. They are not just assisting a customer in front of them, but also meeting expectations shaped by fast delivery, endless choice, and seamless digital experiences.

In India, this mix becomes even more layered. Nearly 88% of retail is still unorganised, built on over 13 million kirana and neighbourhood stores. These are not just points of sale. They run on familiarity, informal credit, and everyday relationships with customers.

At the same time, organised retail and digital platforms are expanding quickly, bringing in scale, consistency, and rising expectations. Both worlds exist side by side, often serving the same customer in different moments of their day.

Growth is also coming from beyond the metros. Tier II and Tier III cities are adding a large share of new consumers, each with their own context and pace of adoption. For organisations, this means operating across very different realities at once.

All of this plays out through people.

Retail teams are largely frontline, customer-facing, and working around changing schedules and peak hours. The work can be repetitive, unpredictable, and always visible. Attrition is high, not because people do not care, but because the demands rarely pause.

This is retail today. A constant mix of physical stores, digital journeys, and neighbourhood relationships. And at the centre of it are frontline employees holding everything together, one interaction at a time.



The Strain Beneath the Surface

Retail looks active, energetic, even straightforward from the outside. But underneath, there's a constant strain that rarely gets acknowledged.

What the data is already telling us



80%

of retail workers report their **mental wellbeing has declined** in recent years

Health of Retail Report 2025



67%

experience **burnout**, with **42%** linking it directly to their job

BBC



69%

experience at least one **mental health symptom**, often lasting months

Mental Health at Work Report, 2023

Retail is also among the least likely sectors to offer mental health benefits

(National Alliance on Mental Illness - NAMI)

1. The job requires constant emotional control

Retail employees are expected to stay calm, helpful, and present regardless of the situation.

- This “emotional labour” (Arlie Hochschild) builds up over time
- Repeated emotional masking is directly linked to burnout, anxiety, and poor sleep

2. Customer behaviour is unpredictable and often harsh

- **54% of retail workers** report facing customer aggression
- **43% have faced verbal abuse** in the past year

Unlike other industries, this is often treated as routine, not as something that needs intervention.

3. Work schedules disrupt more than just work

- Nearly **one-third of workers** have irregular schedules
- “Clopening” shifts are experienced by up to **50% of workers**

Research (Society of Occupational Medicine) shows that this kind of instability is strongly linked to distress, fatigue, and poor overall wellbeing.

4. Financial strain and limited control

- Retail roles often come with lower wages and **limited access to benefits**
- Employees are expected to manage situations without real authority

This mismatch is a known driver of stress in occupational health research.

5. The India context adds another layer



- **10% to 52.9%** of organised retail workers report depression, with similarly high ranges for anxiety and stress
- Only **1 in 10 employees** in India has access to EAP support

What this leads to in retail specifically

This is not just about individual stress. It shows up in ways that are very specific to retail operations:

- High attrition as a norm, not an exception (industry estimates place this around ~60% annually in some markets)
- Inconsistent customer experience, because the same employee who is expected to engage is often exhausted
- Reduced attention to detail, increasing errors and operational gaps
- Managers spending more time firefighting people issues than running stores

Retail runs on frontline consistency. But the environment they operate in makes consistency hard to sustain. That is the core tension the industry is dealing with today.

What Support Looked Like

To address these challenges, the organisation, part of a large, structured retail chain with multiple store locations, partnered with us to introduce an **Employee Assistance Programme (EAP)** as a foundational layer of support.

At its core, the approach was simple: make support accessible, familiar, and easy to reach for a workforce that is constantly on the move.



Multiple access points including phone, chat, and in-person sessions, keeping in mind varying schedules and comfort levels



Manager sensitisation sessions to help them recognise signs of distress and respond appropriately within their teams



Leadership alignment to ensure the programme was positioned as a business priority, not just a benefit



Clear escalation pathways for high-risk situations, ensuring timely and structured intervention when required

Alongside this, communication played a key role. The focus was on consistently reminding employees that support exists and can be accessed without friction or judgement.

The intent was not to overhaul the system overnight, but to introduce a reliable, professional support layer that employees could turn to when needed. A starting point that fits into the reality of retail, rather than disrupting it.

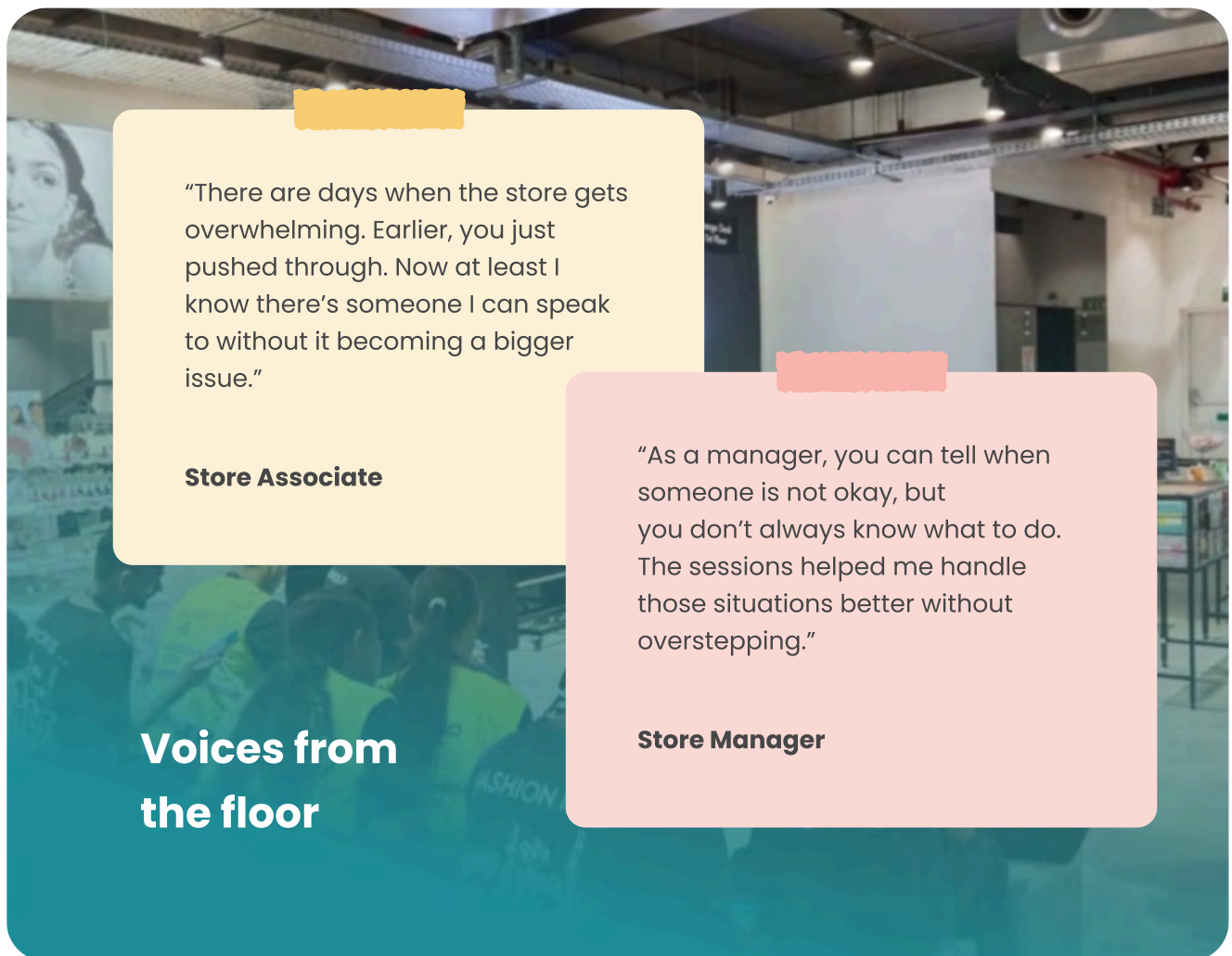
What Changed on the Ground

Given the distributed nature of the workforce, efforts were designed to reach employees across roles and locations. The shift wasn't dramatic or instant. It showed up in smaller, more everyday ways.

In a workplace where most people are used to "just managing," the first change was this: people started reaching out. Not always for big issues. Sometimes just to talk things through before it built up.

- ✔ Conversations around stress became slightly more open and less avoided
- ✔ Managers felt more equipped to respond, instead of stepping back or escalating immediately
- ✔ Employees began using support for both personal and work-related concerns, not just in crisis situations
- ✔ The idea of seeking help started feeling more normal, less like a last resort

What stood out was not volume, but intent. People were engaging earlier, and more willingly.



"There are days when the store gets overwhelming. Earlier, you just pushed through. Now at least I know there's someone I can speak to without it becoming a bigger issue."

Store Associate

"As a manager, you can tell when someone is not okay, but you don't always know what to do. The sessions helped me handle those situations better without overstepping."

Store Manager

**Voices from
the floor**

Final Note

This is what early impact looks like in retail.

Not immediate transformation, but a gradual shift in how people experience and respond to pressure. And in an environment where stress is constant, even small shifts like these begin to matter.

If you're looking to build this kind of support, schedule a demo and we'll walk you through what it could look like for your teams.