

A study on phenomenon of Examination Stress and its Impact on Life of Students.

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Abstract

Examination anxiety, depression and academic stress are prevalent problems in students across the country. A student under a certain level of anxiety and stress does bring out his or her best in examination, however an extreme level can result into stress induced disorders and deteriorating the academic performance Examination stress is a situation of anxiety and tension which arises during examination period. Student feels a lot of changes in active and passive behavior during stress. These changes can be good or bad and can lead to positive or negative results. Examination stress is a psychological condition in which a person experiences distress before, during, or after an exam or other assessment to such an extent that this anxiety causes poor performance or interferes with normal learning. This paper tries to :1) Explore factors that contribute to student stress and2) How students can enhance their coping strategies and care for their Well being during this time 3) How teachers can help students prevent or reduce the impact of stress. A pilot survey among 200 students from schools, colleges and university was done to study the impact of examination stress and factors contributing towards it.

KEY WORDS: Stress, Examination, Students, Parents, Suicide, Community

Introduction

Examination anxiety, depression and academic stress are prevalent problems in students across the country. A student under a certain level of anxiety and stress does bring out his or her best in examination, however an extreme level can result into stress induced disorders and deteriorating the academic performance. Anxiety is a basic human emotion consisting of fear and uncertainty that typically appears when an individual perceives an event as being a threat to the ego or self- esteem (Sarason, 1988). In some instances, such as avoiding dangerous situations, anxiety can be helpful. However when taken to extremes, it may produce unwarranted results. In Indian education system, board examination, which starts at the secondary level of education, is very important because this level provides the base for future education and students face excessive anxiety. Students have anxiety about their marks, performance and also for their academic achievement.

The board exam is the fear in itself. On one hand they wish to secure good percentage of marks for getting admission for their future education and the other hand they also want to prove themselves better than others in this highly competitive age. Sometimes children are pressurized by their parent's expectations, so they suffer from pre-examination anxiety.

This paper tries to: -

- 1) explore factors that contribute to student stress and
- 2) how students can enhance their coping strategies and care for their Well being during this time
- 3) How teachers can help students prevent or reduce the impact of stress.

What is stress?

Stress is a complex physiological and psychological phenomenon. It can be a motivating experience that helps us to get things done and stay focused. However, too much stress can be unhelpful and at times problematic. Stress is a natural physical and mental response to an emotional strain or suspense. The human body responds to events that provide stress (stressors) by activating the nervous system and specific hormones in the body. "Appraising environmental events as harmful' threatening or challenging and responding to that appraisal with physiological, emotional, cognitive, and behavioral changes". (Holman & Silver 1998) Stress is defined as the non-specific response of the body to any demands made upon it.

"Stress is a biological term which refers to the consequences of the failure of a human or animal body to respond appropriately to emotional or physical threats to the organism, whether actual or imagined. It includes a state of alarm and adrenaline production, short-term resistance as a coping mechanism, and exhaustion. It refers to the inability of a human or animal body to respond. Common stress symptoms include irritability, muscular tension, inability to concentrate and a variety of physical reactions, such as headaches and accelerated heart rate". (Hans Selye 1956)

What is Examination stress?

It is a situation of anxiety and tension which arises during examination period. Student feels a lot of changes in active and passive behavior during stress. These changes can be good or bad and can lead to positive or negative results. Examination stress is a psychological condition in which a

person experiences distress before, during, or after an exam or other assessment to such an extent that this anxiety causes poor performance or interferes with normal learning. Many students experience heightened stress levels as examinations approach and in some cases that stress can become very acute, resulting in what many people refer to as panic attacks. Certain types of academic examinations can have a significant impact on psychological and physical health. Academic examinations have often been used in stress research because they are “predictable, standardized, and discrete examples of real-life stressors

What causes stress and what is its impact?

Stress can be caused by a range of problems at home, experiences at school, dizziness, eating too much or too little, or using drugs. Common mental health symptoms of stress include feeling angry, feeling anxious, being moody and easily frustrated, regularly feeling like crying, having low self-esteem, feeling restless all of the time or having trouble sleeping.

Physical sensations

Again anything can happen but typically: sensations of panic, dizziness, muscular tension, hyperventilation, sensations of nausea.

Thinking

Preoccupation with examinations even though the exams may be ages away. Some of the thoughts are uncomfortable ones and may contain self-critical ideas, running oneself down and comparing oneself unfavorably with others in more than one way. One may see the future as bleak with him as a loser - not getting his degree or being inferior to others. There may be some memory loss.

Images

These usually take the form of unpleasant scenes or flashbacks from previous examinations. They can be very vivid. There may be nightmares.

Actions

Student may find himself tending to try and block out the subject of examinations - maybe avoiding going near to the examination halls, not looking at old exam papers, leaving lectures or turning off when the subject is mentioned. He may be too easily distracted with very short spans of concentration. He may tend to find yourself forgetting easily and getting writer's block. One key factor is that his normal functioning at study tasks

becomes lessened. A drop of a quarter of his normal efficiency is indicative of exam stress.

Effect on interaction with others

Other people can be involved in the worry. Student may find himself withdrawing, unable to talk to people as much as usual. He may find himself frightened of what people may say about examinations. People may be less reassuring than usual. Research indicates that individuals who react in an explicitly emotional way to stressors are more likely to develop symptoms of depression compared to those people who employ a constructive approach to problem-solving in difficult situations (Spence et al., 2005).

Examination stress and its impact on students' mental setup.

Here are some stats provided by Ministry of Health, Government of India, in year 2012.

Total deaths because of suicides (Examination stress)

Year 2009 = 2010

Year 2010 = 2479

Year 2011 = 2381

So, it is clear that suicidal tendency has gone up in students because of the examination stress and some concrete steps must be taken to handle this alarming situation as soon as possible.

Research Methodology

In the pilot study conducted among 200 students from schools and colleges it was found that most important factor that led to examination stress was pressure to get more marks so as to cope with the competition. Second factor was parents and peer pressure. Apart from these, it was found that either due to lack of required facilities and staff or due to negligence of teachers extra stress was there in mind of school children preparing for board exams. The Area under study was Punjab university, Chandigarh and schools around the university.

Sample size of 200 students was taken which comprised of 75 School students, 30 from higher secondary, 45 from senior secondary. 50 students from under graduate classes were chosen from all the three streams (Arts, science and commerce) in equal proportion. 75 students from post graduate classes were selected and 55 of them appearing in their final examinations. Out of total 200 samples 100 were females and 100 were males.

Sampling technique used was simple random sampling technique so that every participant from the population had equal chance of getting selected in the sample size.

Data collection was done using both primary and secondary data. An open ended questionnaire was given to students which comprised of 10 questions. Along with it personnel interview wherever possible was also done.

The main questions asked were related to following things: Which of the following do you think is most stressful: preparation of examination ,appearing in it, waiting for result, Mention level of stress while preparing for the exam (likert's scale 5) Mention the level of stress while writing the exam, Mention the level of stress while waiting for result Whom you have consulted before in case of examination stress, What are effects of examination stress you have seen in yourself or in your friends, Do you know stress coping strategies, Do you find them relevant.

Findings

Out of total 200 respondents 183 said that they have faced ill effects of examination stress in one or another way. 126 respondents said that they feel examination stress while preparing and 104 after the exams, while 84 said they felt stress during writing the exam. 190 students felt examination stress because of pressure of getting good marks and for admissions in good courses or placements, whereas 120 agreed they had parents pressure. 48 out of 100 male respondents agreed that because of examination stress they inclined towards alcohol and smoking. 24 respondents agreed that they could have taken extreme steps if proper consultation would have been missing.190 respondents agreed that proper guidance and consultation can help to recover from ill effects of examination stress. Stress and anxiety experienced during the examinations is often attributed to the fear of failure and can have lasting negative impacts on the self esteem of the student. Examination anxiety has been reported to produce debilitating cognitive effects including difficulties with memory and recalling information. This can then affect student performance inducing further stress and feelings of self doubt and inadequacy.

Conclusion and Recommendations

In addition to these general developmental tasks, young people are also often exposed to other negative risk factors that can have significant impacts on their social and emotional wellbeing. These can include violence,

poverty, social exclusion, peer rejection and a lack of family support. For this reason, adolescent mental health experts point to this period as being a high risk time for the onset of many psychological problems and disorders such as depression, anxiety, psychosis, drug and alcohol dependence and sleep disorders

Causes of Exam Stress: Exam stress is result of many causes, student emotions combined with their thought and several other factors can create high levels of exam stress.

Competition: This is important factor that can result in exam stress because during that period there is more competition amongst students. This might be because the results of exam will play important rule in acceptance for higher levels of education

Negative Thinking: Negative thoughts that occur during exams are important factor that causes exam stress. You shouldn't think how difficult is the exam, how long is the study literature, how hard it is to acquire all the necessary knowledge or how failure will result in less prosperous future.

Lack of Self Confidence: This is probably one of the main factors that cause exam stress as well as other types of stress. It Exam stress is an unfortunate part of life for many in school. Students getting ready for exams often feel a lot of pressure, which can result in nervousness and anxiety.

Expectations of their teachers and family: Many students want to please everyone, and do their best so as not to let anyone down. This high standard can exacerbate exam stress.

Fear of perceived failure: A certain portion of exam stress can come from within the student themselves, If they dwell on the exam's difficulty, and worrying about their grade, they will almost certainly feel more stress.

What can teachers do to help students to manage stress and exams

Fortunately, teachers can help students to manage their stress by understanding the phenomenon of stress, its causes, impacts and what can be done to reduce or eliminate its effects. As teachers, we can play an active role in supporting students to cope with the stress of senior year exams and other developmental and social changes impacting on their lives at this time. For example, teachers can educate about healthy lifestyle skills and methods available to help combat exam stress. A proactive and multifaceted approach to enhance belonging and connectedness can increase student's faith in teachers and system. This should include programs to promote and

develop suitable coping strategies, educating students about the importance of positive relationships and maintaining a supportive teaching environment.

How students can help themselves

Feeling anxious before a big exam may always be part of student life, but letting that anxiety turn into stress does not have to be. By knowing why they have exam stress, students can take more steps to prevent it.

Organize. Make sure you have all the things necessary for the exam: your stationery, your identity ticket, your watch etc. Last-minute searching for things can stress your mind further and create panic during the exam which can be disastrous.

Diet. Before you go to the exam, eat foods that are energy producing and at the same time not too heavy on your stomach that make you sleepy in the examination hall. Never go in on an empty stomach as you can end up concentrating more on your hunger than your exam paper.

Relax. One hour before the exam, relax!! Don't stress yourself feeding more information to your already worked-up brain. Whatever you have learned, be confident of it and try to picture a calm stream, or take some deep breaths.

Plan. Once you get the question paper in your hand, read all the questions and make a quick rough plan how you are going to invest your time for doing your best. Mark the questions which you know the best and attempt them first. In this manner, you will increase your confidence further

Cross-check. It is very, very important to check your answers again in the end. The last 15 minutes should be to review your paper. Recheck every answer with patience and you will be surprised by how many careless faults you come across. Make the necessary corrections.

Forget. Most of the time after the exam is over, we worry about the results or waste time discussing what our friends have written. Realize that the time to do something about the results passed when you handed the answer sheet to the examiner. Knowing how your friend did on the paper will only add more worry.

Taking the exam. Scan each page of the exam before starting to make sure you have all the questions. This will also help you decide how much time you'll need to complete it. Read all the instructions on the exam. Do the questions you can answer first to make sure you get the marks for them. Pace yourself. Stay until the end of the exam in case you remember an

answer. Go back, review your answers, and remember the relaxation techniques you learned. Breathe

What parents can do to help students

Tell your children to start studying early. Tell them, start studying as soon as your teacher announces the exam. Even before that, read over your notes after each class to make sure you understand them. Put the notes in your own words. They can prepare even more by thinking of questions that their teacher might ask on an exam. Write the questions down and answer them after their class is finished. This will make studying easier.

Have a plan to manage their time. Cramming all night doesn't usually work. Plan their study time ahead so they feel confident for the exam. Plan to have enough time to study about 50 minutes at a time with five or 10-minute breaks. Let them have a snack, watch some TV or go for a walk. Study so they understand the material and not just memorize it. Plan to let them study in a place where they can concentrate without distractions.

Provide them healthy food and exercise. Studies show that taking the time to get some exercise and eating healthy improves performance on exams. So get out and get moving. When we're stressed we sometimes want to eat junk food but eating healthy will actually make them feel better. Good sleep helps them remember what they have learnt.

Practice, practice, practice. Tell your children to go for a practice test. If there isn't one, make your own. Grade their performance and if you cannot let them do it among their peers.

Talk to them If you find that they're still stressed, talk to them.

Conclusion

Exams are important as their result influence future professional career, social status and self esteem. Every person has own optimal level of worry and anxiety, which helps him or her to achieve best results but if it exceeds a certain level it can lead to stress and mental problems. We must learn how to control extra stress and anxiety for preparation of exams. We as teachers must prepare students to handle stress in a better way. Here are some interventions which can be used at different levels to cope with examination stress: Education efforts to alert community Participation of public health experts along with psychologists, school counselor and social workers. Protecting and helping students in distress Awareness of Suicidal behavior. PTA Meetings, Peer counseling programmes. Apart from these

interventions, there are some myths which need to be shattered, and these are, Marks in exams are directly proportional to brilliance or intelligence Success in one exam means success in Life. Good marks fetch you good jobs Failure in exam means failure in life and that is the end of life. So, best way to handle examination stress is that parents, teachers and students along with the people who are part of education system must work together so that t stress remains upto a level which helps students to excel in life and not end their lives.

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