Study of Psychological Pressure of Examination on Teen Age Students and its Management Strategies

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ABSTRACT
The World Health Organization (WHO) defines adolescence as the period of life between 13-19 years. Adolescence is said to be a period of stress and strain. Adolescents are a special group because of their developmental stage and the special problems. Examination in school or college is a part of academic life. The incidence of exam anxiety has risen from 22% in 2013 to almost 36% in 2016 among all the calls received. Examination stress is better prevented than treated. A systematic, persistent, organized, planned and regular effort from the beginning of the academic session is the best method for any adolescent to prevent anxiety related to examination. This paper focuses on how a holistic approach can be adopted to successfully manage and control examination stress amongst young students.

1. INTRODUCTION
Examination in school or college is a part of academic life. It has been said sometimes that “Student exam stress is creating mental health time bombs”. It is perfectly normal to feel some stress, but too much of it will reduce effectiveness. They need to appear for examination in school, college or competitive examination during, which they face lot of stress and strain. The Family Doctor Association has also reported a rise in the number of teenagers seeking help for ‘exam-related’ stress. The British Association for Counseling and Psychotherapy has also reported increase in demand for such services. The incidence of exam anxiety has risen from 22% in 2013 to almost 36% in 2016 among all the calls received. Few of the important predisposing factors for examination stress include family pressure for the best result, deciding examinations for future growth, emotionally immaturity, peer factor, poor self-image and negative thoughts, stimulating agents like tea, coffee, cola, etc. taken before the exams. Student suicidal attempts are more common during the time of examinations or the declaration of results. Also due to the examination, the students may get depressed or develop phobia. In such cases they may need counseling, antidepressant drugs or more family support.

2. SIGNS OF EXCESS STRESS
Release of various stress hormones in the body to combat situations of stress might lead to an edgy and nervous feeling. Muscles become tense, breathing faster, mouth dry, while the heart pounds and sweating increases. Early signs of excessive stress are headache, loss or change in sleep pattern, loss of appetite and temper, tired and sick feeling, loss of concentration and sense of restlessness. Sometimes the unusually excessive stress may trigger panic attacks, depression, drug abuse, alcohol abuse, eating disorder or even self-harming behavior like suicide attempts. Some may even present with tension headache, writer's cramp and while others may present with some nonspecific complaints. An adolescent with sleepless nights, troubled thoughts, loss of appetite, rapid pulse and trembling hands is a typical case of exam fear. These problems need attention by the physician. High-risk students should be recognized early and intervention should be done accordingly.

3. MANAGEMENT OF EXAMINATION STRESS
Examination stress is better prevented than treated. A systematic, persistent, organized, planned and regular effort from the beginning of the academic session is the best method for any adolescent to prevent anxiety related to examination. The best way to prevent exam stress is confidence, ensured by timely preparation for the exam. Propranolol can be of some help in reducing symptoms of examination stress. High-degree of anxiety and stress may hamper their performance.

Some may also attempt suicide, though there is no strong evidence for the same. De-stressing methods may also be adopted once someone develops examination stress. These methods are self-help techniques and are straight forward and effective, which are helpful in the long run upto the examination. These include the following:

1) Breathing techniques: If breathing becomes rapid and shallow, sit somewhere in a comfortable place and check how quickly you are breathing by placing your hand on stomach. If it is one breath in a couple of seconds, start breathing out slowly till you get out the last of the breaths in the series in about five seconds time. This has to be done for some time till you are doing it naturally.
(2) **Relaxation routine:** Close your eyes and breathe deeply. Try to locate areas of tension and relax these muscles. Think of relaxation and after 20 minutes do some stretching exercise.

(3) **Physical activity:** Regular exercise for even as short as 10-20 minutes a day can be very helpful in coping with stress in the long run. Cycling, going to gymnasium or walking all help to reduce stress.

(4) **Complementary therapies:** Yoga, meditation and massage help in reducing stress and providing relaxation.

(5) **Sleep:** Sleep hygiene must be maintained. Stimulants must be avoided before sleep. A good bath can relax you most of the time and give you a comfortable sleep. Medications for inducing sleep must be avoided.

(6) **Support groups:** Choose a fellow mate for custody or create a study circle. This group will support you through discussion and even clarify doubts through mutual support. Maintaining clarity of thought long before the study process will help you not to panic before exam.

4. **PREVENTION OF EXAMINATION STRESS**

It is well said that prevention is better than cure. So, in case of examination stress too. If student and parents follow some of the below mentioned practices, examinations stress can be controlled to a larger extent.

**For the Student**

4.1 **During the Whole Academic Session**

Systematic planned and organized preparation for the examination is very essential for a student. Using time management techniques is also necessary since student life is all about learning how to achieve a balance between studies and other activities. Keeping to a healthy lifestyle is another key to controlling stress. Adequate sleep, regular outdoor exercise, and a well-balanced diet, are all essential ingredients for beating stress. Friendship with academically good students will also help. Avoiding substance abuse can mean a lot. It has been found that mild stress increases examination performance, while more stress may rather hamper performance.

4.2 **At the Time of Examination**

The student should avoid late night reading and dinner, unhealthy foods and discussion about previous papers. Not attempting to study a new topic at the last moment would be the best advice to avoid stress and anxiety. Drugs or brain tonics do not have a role in these situations.

4.3 **In the Examination Hall**

Avoiding anxiety provoking discussion with friends is the best thing to be done. Going to the examination hall in proper time and with positive attitude will be fruitful. The student needs to be comfortable in the examination and read and understand the question paper before beginning to answer. Planning to answer the questions as per his/her ability and within the stipulated time is always advisable. The questions which can be solved should be taken up first. A little time should be kept to revise the answer sheet. Writing answers to the point can save a lot of time and avoid panic. Postmortem discussions are always discouraged.

5. **FOR THE PARENTS**

Parents should not stress on rank, class, marks, grades, etc. They need to be positive and reassuring with regular emphasis on success. They should appreciate the efforts and encourage their child. Negative talks should be avoided, so also comparison. They need to avoid imbibing their own anxiety into the examinee. Spending time with him/her during difficult time will also be helpful. They have to be friendly with them and try to offer feeling of security and love and warmth in relationship. Child should not be forced to study and should be allowed to relax in between. They should not over expect nor overreact on failures or mistakes. A study atmosphere must be made for the child. Avoiding conflicts within the family members in front of children during the time of examination can also help a lot. Discussing various options of career with the child can help him/her prepare for selecting alternatives available in life. They should be given utmost importance at the time of crucial stages in life and a situation should never be created, where the child may feel neglected and move into depression.

This vicious cycle that can lead to suicide should always be prevented at the earliest. Suicide is never a solution for examination stress; this should be imprinted in the minds of the child, that it is not the end of the world. There are many other career alternatives, which may suit better.

6. **FOR THE EXAMINATION SYSTEM**

As there have been several revolutions in the present system of examination, this should be strictly followed. There are several public sector examinations (PSCs), where grade conversion is still followed and scores rather than grades are still considered for admission or employment. This should be replaced by other systems such as developing a well-designed interview system, which would take care of all the abilities required in the candidate - starting from psychology, aptitude, general knowledge to specific skills required for the post or academic session with a score for the grade, a simple and well-designed interview system. There are several academic institutions and several competitive examinations, which have adopted this system, but universalization has to be done.

7. **INITIATIVES FROM THE GOVERNMENT**

Information, Education and Communication (IEC) and Behavior Change Communication (BCC) activities regarding examination stress and its management should be conducted...
by the government. Several leading health channels and television programs in leading channels can be used to convey the message to the parents and guardians. One such example is 'Parvarish', a Hindi television serial telecast on Sony Entertainment TV in India. Such serials also need to be taken up in local language television channels. Group and panel discussions must be used to convey the messages and share best practices of different families. It is high time that different non-governmental organizations (NGOs) working for child health take up this issue in their agenda. Different operations research need to be encouraged and social and/or psychological researches on detailed cause of suicides and depression due to examination stress should be taken up. Apart from all these general matters, it is always the environment in which the child grows, which contributes to the way in which he/she reacts to an examination.

8. CONCLUSION
Finally, it should be noted that some children handle all situations coolly, while others start panicking with even a small problem at hand. Hence, it is very necessary that parents should always encourage their children and keep them busy with other extracurricular activities like music, dance, sports, etc. and also help as stress busters. Focus of the government and NGOs should shift to this issue along with other issues, so that this epidemic may be prevented in time before flaring-up in the decades to come.

REFERENCES


