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A Growing Mental Stress among Students: Diagnosis and Remedies

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Abstract

*With the development of the society, there is no doubt that the way we live has changed completely. However, this change is now receiving complaints from more and more people, especially children, who are under high pressure to meet their parents' expectation. In such a world of global integration, there is a tendency that the young are motivated to learn a variety of things to meet their parents' demand. In addition, the society is actually becoming more and more competitive. As a consequence, the effects of this have been and will continue to be controversial. Firstly, there has been a widespread concern in health related disaster amongst children who do not spend enough time on some extracurricular activities such as dance, sports as well as recreation. Sleep deprivation, eating disorders, excessive worrying, cheating, burnout, loss of interest in hobbies or withdrawing from friends and family can all be consequences of excess **pressure**. There are cases when children have attempted and even succeeded at suicide because their stress went unnoticed. However, with the help of some counselling and parental role in handling stress, children can certainly be helped. In such cases counselling plays major role to bring out the kids from depression, anxiety etc.*

Introduction

Parental pressure is when a parent puts too much strain on their child to force them to exceed. The pressure is normally to be the best in the chosen field, even one that they used to succeed at and now can't. The pressure can come from any type of family and can be the pressure to be the best in the grade in school and receive highest marks. Or to score the most points or goals in the sporting match and win the best on ground. It would be to play the best music or paint the award-winning picture; or the pressure could be to succeed in the career field and receive the same promotions and scores as the parents once did.

All parents love to see their child exceed in sport, school or even socially, but it's not that common that a child be the absolute best in the field. Parents strive for their child to excel and be the highest achiever in all fields of sport, art, music, and school and socially but this isn't possible. The joy a child receives from their favourite activity should reflect success. It is human nature to desire to excel. If an individual puts that pressure on himself/herself alone, the extra pressure from a parent isn't needed then.

Children can relate to parent pressure in many different ways. Some can become over-achievers and need to excel in everything they try regardless of what the activity is. Others can become anxious and afraid to fail which can cause depression. Living up to an expectation of someone can sometimes be very hard. It may discourage the child. That means the child may turn into the 'I can't' child. The 'I can't' child decides to give up without trying and this can cause him/her to whine and even become stubborn, causing to not want to try anything new. Children with pressure parents often turn to other revenues to express their pain like self-harm, depression, anxiety and substance abuse.

Causes of mental stress

A growing problem not only in India but all over the globe is that students are more stressed than ever. A common cause of concern is the pressures from parents to do well. Here are some reasons:

1. **All Rounder Children-** A secure and happy family environments is the bare necessity for the healthy growth and development of a child. In India, education and academics have been the traditional focal points of stress. Parental pressure for children to excel in their studies has been unusually high. A compelling need to excel in academics coming from the family, often tends to abuse, cripples the student's morale and is one of the greatest causes for failure and breakdown.
2. **Higher expectations-** It is undeniable that a large amount of the pressure comes from the parents. In Maharashtra and Tamil Nadu, for example, a common complaint is that parents compel their wards to take up science and mathematics as subjects in high school in the hope that their children may become engineers or doctors. The children themselves may be interested in commerce or arts- a choice completely ignored.
3. **Indian Education system-** Time and time again many complaints have been made against the Indian education system which is more inclined towards memorization

and takes long systematic study hours. Leaving less time for recreational activities and socialization which is an essential part of the development of a child.

4. **IIT's are everything-** Parents think that their future is secure only if they get a degree from these top colleges and if they study from any other average/lower ranked colleges than their future is spoiled. Yes, many companies come to these colleges for campus placement and relatively less companies come to lower ranked colleges. There are other misconceptions related to the salary packages that if someone pass out from IIT they will earn in lakhs and millions.
5. **Career Myths- Top career myths that influence a student to inappropriately choose a career are as below:**
 - If a student has scored good marks in class 10th, he/she has to take Science stream. Arts and Commerce streams are only meant for average and weak students.
 - If a student is good in mathematics, he/she should become a software engineer.
 - If a student likes to play games in computer, he/she should become a software engineer.

Effects of mental stress

As Twitter celebrity@reggedtag says, *"Mera beta hamesha first aata hai syndrome has ruined everything."*

Students at either level experience stress from parental pressures. Parents want their children to succeed in school. They want to see good grades, but they also want to see success in life's other areas. In their attempts to guide their children, parents can become one of the major causes of stress on students. In fact, India has one of the highest rates of suicides among people aged between 15 and 29. Although the reasons are myriad but failure in examination, unemployment, and depression are some of the reasons why people put their life at risk. Parental pressure can affect children in many ways like-

Anxiety - The Psychologists suggest that students suffer from anxiety and traumatic disorder relating to fear of examination. The fear factor is the reason why students suffer from anxiety, depression, and the following consequences. And the fear not only comes from the school but also from parents, who go to extreme levels to push their children into getting better grades.

Fear- Fear of failure to do well in studies is causing anxiety among students which has substantial negative effects on their academic and social success. The self-worth of a student is determined by the academic success and grades, and not on the basis of individual qualities they already do possess.

Poor academic performance – This unfortunate journey starts when parents push their child to opt for career streams and subjects that they do not enjoy or have the aptitude to pursue. It leads to lack of motivation, focus and interest which ultimately leads to poor academic performance. One of the 12 students who committed suicide referred to her mother in her last note – *“You manipulated me as a kid to like Science, I took science to make you happy”*.

Bad Behavior- Too much pressure to do well in school can cause kids to do unethical things. For instance, a child who has been told that he/she must get all A’s on the report card, could feel pressured to cheat on an exam or assignment in order to fulfill that obligation. He/she might also turn to drugs or alcohol to deal with the stress.

Failure- Failure in examinations is among the top 10 reasons for suicide in the country while family problems among the top three. Here are few examples of parental pressure.

Around 1.50 lakh students arrive in Kota every year from all over the country to prepare for medical and engineering entrance examinations. The past one year has witnessed the suicides of 45 students in Kota city and this year the mark has already touched 12, with 2 of them occurring in the month of July. **Kriti**, student of IIT at Kota’s Vibrant Academy, committed suicide a day after her IIT JEE (main) results were declared. She jumped from the fifth floor of her rented apartment in Kota. Another girl **Ishikha Raj**, student of Allen academy Kota aspirant from Bihar, has committed suicide due to fear of failure in exam (NEET).

Here are few signs that a child is stressed-

1. Disinterest is one of the greatest signs of a stressed child. Lack of interest in studies, playtime, television and entertainment or outdoor activities, extraordinary fatigue, lack of hunger, disturbed sleep patterns are signs that something is not quite right.
2. Watch out for frequent bouts of sicknesses. Frequent headaches, stomach aches and induced nausea are some ways a young child may deal with fear or anxiety.
3. Negativity and negative behavior is almost revealing when it comes to a child’s state of mind. Negative behavior could include mood swings, aggression, social isolation or refusal to interact with peers and anxiety.

4. When it comes to teenagers, parental pressure and resultant stress may translate into rebellion. Undesirable activities such as smoking, drug addiction are clear signs that a child is stressed.
5. Excessive pressure may lead a child to perform poorly in academics or in activities that he/she naturally good at.

Recent studies between 2012 and 2014 reveal that young adults of wealthier and educated families in the urban belt are more prone to ending their lives. According to a 2014 news report about 2,471 students in the country took their lives in 2013 after having failed in examinations; in 2012, this number was pegged at 2,246. Most of these suicides are a result of parental pressure and high expectations, not consummate with the student's skills or interests, say experts. Maharashtra, Tamil Nadu, Andhra Pradesh, West Bengal and Madhya Pradesh seem to have set the worst precedents in this field.

An HSBC study on the hopes and expectation of parents on their children's education brings out some very interesting insights on how different cultures value learning. The study which covers more than a dozen countries including India shows that parent's aspirations are not much different across both developing and developed countries.

According to the study the most important goal that Indian parents have for their children is that they build successful careers in their adult life. This is the ultimate goal for 51% of the Indian parents surveyed.

When asked to rank three most important goals that they wanted their child to achieve the best as an adult, 51% Indian parents choose successful careers, while 49% choose happiness in life, 33% identified a healthy life style, 22% wanted them to earn enough for a comfortable life and 17% rated fulfilling their children's potential as the ultimate goal.

However, parents in most developed countries did not give much weightage to successful careers. Only one fifth of the parents in the United States regard successful careers as an ultimate goal. The share of parents supporting such a goal is even lower in United Kingdom and Australia (17% each). Asian nations like China, Taiwan and Hong Kong also don't rate successful careers as too important with the share of parents supporting it as an ultimate goal being 15%, 17% and 19% respectively.

What is even more interesting, is the substantial differences of opinion between Indian and other parents on the goals they have set for their children. Being happy in life was the ultimate goal of parents in more than a dozen countries ranging from 56% in Indonesia, 58%

in Hong Kong, 60% in UAE to 77% in UK, 78% in Canada and 86% in France. However, only 49% of the Indian parents rated happiness in life as one of the three most important goals.

All these certainly show that Indian parents have set the bar a bit too high for the children to easily match.

Remedies

From the young age, children are encouraged to think that exams are supremely important and off-late, these exams are becoming quite competitive. In such a situation, when exam stress becomes too much, children tend to crumble. There are cases when children have attempted and even succeeded at suicide because their exam related stress went unnoticed. However, with the help of some counseling and parental role in handling stress, children can certainly be helped.

Introspect- Introspection is a key element of parenting. Parents should communicate with their kids to know their interest.

Encourage- Encouragement, coming from parents, can be a child's stepping stone to success. Parents should teach their child to work hard and be confident. It is parent's responsibility to teach their child to accept failure without losing heart. Failure is a cue to seek newer opportunities and not an occasion of mourning.

Interact- The best way to interact with kids is to participate in their activities like playing. It will help to build camaraderie and friendship between child and parent.

Help them study- Parents could either help children study actively, by actually helping them with their work, or they could just provide them with a conducive and calm environment.

Take efforts into making things easier for them- Exam time and test time can put a lot of pressure on the children. At this point of time parents should support their kids to study freely rather putting pressure to get good grades.

Make sure they don't overdo it: When a child is feeling stressed out about the exams, they will start overdoing it. They might start studying more than it is good for them. In such case parents should keep an eye on their schedule.

Seek help- Seeking professional help is no longer taboo. In fact family counseling is a necessary part of today's life. Psychologists and counselors can help us to identify kids' problems and negative behavioral patterns.

Let them be free- Stop projecting your unfulfilled dreams on your child. Stop forcing your child to do something which you couldn't achieve. She/he is not a tool to fulfill your unaccomplished aspirations and desires. He/she is different. Give them a gift of free will. Let them carve their own career path. Let them pursue their own dreams and fly in a sky painted by their own aspirations.

How counselling is helpful-

According to the American **Counselling** Association “**Counselling** is a professional relationship that empowers diverse individuals, families and groups to accomplish mental health, wellness and education and career goals.”

Our world is increasingly becoming more interconnected. This globalization highlights the need for highly trained mental health professionals to address trauma, addiction, depression, parental pressure, academic and career concerns in clinics, hospitals, schools, and universities. These are few therapies which are helpful to bring out the kids from various problems like behavioural issues

CBT- Cognitive behavioural therapy (CBT) is a short-term, goal-oriented psychotherapy **treatment** that takes a hands-on, practical approach to problem-solving. Its goal is to change patterns of thinking or **behaviour** that are behind people's difficulties, and so change the way they feel. It helps people to develop alternative ways of thinking and behaving which aims to reduce their psychological distress.

One of the earliest form of this therapy was REBT developed by Albert Ellis in the 1950s. It is a type of cognitive therapy first used by Albert Ellis. It focuses on resolving emotional and behavioral problems. The goal of the therapy is to change irrational beliefs to more rational ones.

BDI- The Beck Depression Inventory (BDI) is a series of questions developed to measure the intensity, severity, and depth of depression in patients with psychiatric diagnoses. Its long form is composed of 21 questions, each designed to assess a specific symptom common among people with depression. Each with four possible responses, each response is assigned a score ranging from zero to three, indicating the severity of the symptom. A version designed for use by primary care providers (BDI-PC) is composed of seven self-reported items, each correlating to a symptom of **major depressive disorder** experienced over the preceding two weeks.

Behavior modification is a therapeutic approach designed to change a particular undesirable negative **behavior**. By using a system of positive or negative consequences, an individual learns the correct set of responses for any given stimulus. Behavior therapy – also referred to as “behavioral therapy”, “behavior modification” or “applied behavior analysis” – is a form of psychotherapy that involves reducing or eliminating behaviors and habits that are destructive, unhealthy, or undesirable and learning or increasing more appropriate behaviors. It is based on the premise that we are all shaped or “conditioned” by our environment. We learn to continue doing behaviors that are reinforced in some manner, and to stop doing those that aren’t. In traditional behavior therapy, maladaptive or abnormal behaviors are believed to be the result of defective learning. For example, people *learn* to be anxious, compulsive, or inattentive.

The goal of behavior therapy is to reduce or eliminate undesirable behaviors and teach or increase acceptable behaviors. This is accomplished through the use of behavioral techniques and strategies such as systematic desensitization, modeling, reinforcement, and aversive conditioning. Unlike psychoanalysis and other more psychodynamic approaches to therapy, behavior therapy relies on these conditioning techniques to help people make desired changes, rather than focusing on unconscious processes that may play a role in unhealthy or unwanted behaviors

Conclusion

In Conclusion, living up with parent’s expectations is one of the problems facing the children like us today. In my point of view, to solve this kind of problem parents need to have their understandings for their children. Especially, they need to accept their children for who they are, apart from what they do.

Message to students

I would like to tell you that 'mistakes are part of our life, everyone does that and that is a proof of being a human. We only need to learn from it. Actually it is an important part of learning'. If you think that 'I did not study to my full potential or full perfection and I wasted my time in chasing girls/relationship or playing games or on internet', then I would like to inform you that no one can be perfect, we can only try to be perfect.

Consider yourself as your favourite cricketer; if you did not perform well in some match what would you do? SUICIDE!! Of course not, life will give you lots of more opportunities.

DO NOT QUIT from the game of life believe me game of life is much more interesting than the game of cricket and you just keep moving forward.

Message to parents

Your child is already under pressure from coaching and highly competitive environment. There is no need to put extra pressure because that may harm mental state of your ward and will harm his performance too, i.e. instead of performing good, he can even get less result than his potential. You should tell the following things to your child:-

- Take care of your health.
- Do not indulge yourself in drugs, smoking or drinking.
- Tell them to do their best and forget the rest.

And at the end I would say- Don't put your child in a cage, created by your own aspirations and dreams. It is important for the child to identify the right race for himself rather getting into the rat race. Let your child find his/her own path, and find own passion. Let him/her dream, think of impossibilities & consider the less travelled paths. Let the child fly and be free to choose his/her own career!

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