

SEMINAR PAPER

TITLE - EXAMINATION STRESS : SOCIAL WORK INTERVENTION

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Introduction to examination stress

Over the last few years there has been an increase in examination stress among students in the higher classes of schools in India. High per cent of the students appearing for board examinations, are experiencing more anxiety than they can handle. Media reports indicate increased rate of suicide among students especially around the examination time. Government and non-government organizations have initiated telecounselling services to help students cope up with the examination stress since a few years. Helpline counselors face an increasing number of anxious students and parents who are unable to handle stress due to examination. There is also an increase in the number of students suffering from traumatic disorders related to the fear of examinations.

Examination stress is the uneasiness, apprehensions or nervousness and extreme fear of performing poorly in the examination, and has now become a common form of stress among school students. Students suffering from examination stress may experience the association of academic performance with personal worth or fear of alienation from parents or friends or time pressure and feeling a loss of control. An optimal level of arousal is necessary to best complete a task such as examination. However, when the stress or level of arousal exceeds that optimum, it results in a decline in performance. The reasons for this apparent increase in prevalence of examination stress during the past years are unclear but may be related to parental or teacher pressure. Although the origin is unclear, it is clear that examination stress affects a substantial proportion of school age children.

Examination stress is responsible for the student losing confidence in them and this lowers their self-esteem. The student feels he is a loser and is not able to cope with the examination situation. This in turn affects his personality and how he judges himself among his peer group and the society. Examination stress could be short lived but in some cases it effects and scars the child's self-esteem permanently. The other effects of examination stress are negative influence on academic achievement (Sarason et al., 1960). In its most extreme form, it can be a contributing factor to school refusal (Ollendick and Meyer, 1984).

Researches have shown that stress is manifested in the body in as many as 1,200 ways (Groppe, 2005). Manifestations of examination stress are varied but they can be classified into four categories- physical, cognitive, emotional and behavioral. Physical manifestation include headache, dizziness, insomnia, clenching jaws, grinding teeth, facial twitching, nausea, vomiting, heartburn, indigestion, cramps, diarrhea, constipation, shaking, trembling, tremor of hands, clenching of fists, agitation, restlessness, feeling hyper, fatigue, weakness and appetite loss.

Cognitive manifestations include decrease in concentration and increased forgetfulness, loss of decisiveness, decrease in sense of humor, mind racing, drawing blanks or confusions, indifference and loss of motivation. Emotional manifestations of examination stress include anxiousness, nervousness, depression, sadness or unhappiness, fear, worry, pessimism, irritability, impatience, anger and frustration, while behavioral manifestation are exhibited by fidgeting, pacing, restlessness, compulsive smoking, drinking, overeating, nail biting, foot tapping, jiggling knees, blaming, yelling, swearing, crying, weeping and feeling of always being on the verge of tears. There is a relation between stress and somatic symptoms.

Factors contributing to examination stress

Examination stress is on the rise because of the overemphasis on performance and perfectionism. Individuals are born with different talents and are not the same in intelligence, skills, capacities and abilities. But performance and perfectionism in education is gauged by achieving the first position in the examination, not realizing that only one can hold the first position. The competition for highest marks also has its adverse effects. The emphasis is not on developing competency or performance, but on the marks obtained in the examination. The evaluation by percentages has created an unhealthy competitive environment in the educational system. There is cutthroat competition, which considers marks to decimal points. These pressures contribute to high examination stress among students especially for those appearing in the board examination or the school leaving examinations.

With families becoming more and more nuclear, parents have higher aspirations and expectations from their limited number of children. They want a super child who should excel in all spheres of life. The parents, many a time, wants their own ambitions to be fulfilled by their children. Children are also seen as a status symbol. All these put unwarranted pressure on the children. Lot of emphasis is given on the Board examination (Board examinations are the X and XII class examination that are conducted by the government examination boards) by parents, peer group as well as teachers and the school, as though this is the most important examination of life that will determine the child's future. The child sees everyone around over-concerned and over-conscious about his/her examination, further putting more pressure on him/her. The school environment also exerts pressure on the students for better results, as the school also has to perform better at the national/state level in the board examination to keep its name high. Some schools in an attempt to keep the pressure on the students retain students who are not performing well in preboards (an examination held in schools before the board examination in X and XII classes). Schools don't want to give a chance to the students, as such school fears that if the students fail in the board examination, the name of the school will be tarnished. Thus many students are forced to

leave the schools, if they are not up to the standard of the school.

The higher educational scenario too is also very competitive in India. The seats available in professional and non-professional courses at the college level are limited and cannot accommodate the large number of students passing from the schools every year. In order to get admission to professional courses, students have to clear entrance examination, further increasing the examination anxiety at the secondary level. The employment opportunities, especially in the public sector are also decreasing. There is a situation of very high demand for admission to higher studies and employment but lesser opportunities. Privatization has added to the problem. There has been a decrease in jobs available and there is a culture of 'hire and fire' in the public sector. Permanent jobs are replaced by contracts. Even today medical (MBBS) and engineering (B.E.) courses are considered as the best professional courses and students accord the highest priority to these courses. Management degree is a recent addition to this along with other professional courses like computers, biotechnology etc. The students even without getting an opportunity to realize their interest and capability are pushed towards these professions.

Need for intervention

The consequence of examination stress adversely affects the future of the students by affecting their performance in the examination. This could also be the cause for suicides among students. Students who have been suffering on account of examination stress, endure everything with the hope that he/she will realize his expectations but when results are declared, realizing the losses, take the extreme step towards self-destruction. The National Crime Record Bureau, in 2000 reported a total of 2320 people (1271 males and 1049 females) who committed suicide due to failure in different examinations. The extent of suicide due to examination failure accounts for 2.14 percent of the total suicides in the country (Handbook on Social Welfare Statistics, 2004). These figures show that examination stress has emerged as a major concern for social work interventions in schools. The increasing trend in the suicide deaths due to examination failure from 1380 persons in 1990 to 2320 persons in 2000 is also a matter of concern.

Students cope with examination stress in ways they think are right; many a times they are not consciously aware of the stress and strain and may also resort to negative coping mechanisms. These affect them adversely and cause further problems. For example students may resort to medicines to increase concentration and reduce sleep and stress. The abuse of drugs causes short term and long term problems in them and finally they are not able to accomplish their targets of getting good results in school. The well being of students is of prime importance to the school and

preparing for examinations is only one of the objectives of the school. Stress cannot be totally eliminated but has to be reduced and appropriately managed. Students need to be introduced to intervention techniques to understand the phenomenon, so that they are empowered to handle this situation.

Society recognizes the presence of examination stress of school students and various government and non-government organizations are incorporating measures in their working with school students to address this problem. Services like telephonic counseling, face to face counseling, talks, seminars are being provided to help students and parents to face the problem of examination stress. CBSE, Directorate of education, NCERT, Snehi, Sumaitri Berfriends India, Sanjeevani Society for Mental Health, VIMHANS, Max Health Clinic and Sarthak are some of the organizations that have planned measures to improve the situation in the city of Delhi. Central Board of Secondary Education, the examination board of the country has brought in examination reforms to arrest the problem. From 2006, CBSE examination has given an extra 15 minutes to read the question paper, giving time to de-stress the students before the examination. By 2008, CBSE will change to Grading Point Average (GPA) system for classes IX & X. The grading will help to reduce the examination stress without blurring the lines between good and mediocre students. NCERT has suggested a system of continuous and comprehensive evaluation (CCE) to reduce examination stress among school students. This lays emphasis on school-based assessment. Primary classes already have CCE in place. The National Progressive Schools Conference (NPSC), an association of more than 100 prominent independent schools of Delhi along with an NGO have introduced a comprehensive mental health programme into their curriculum so that the mental health issues of the students can be taken up, of which one of problems being taken up is examination stress.

Methodology

The main aim of this paper is to prepare a social work intervention model that would help deal with the problem of examination stress among school students. The researcher conducted indepth interviews with 16 professionals that helped in designing the social work intervention model. The selection of professionals was done using a purposive method of sampling. Four different groups of professionals who are directly involved with students were identified as

- Teachers/Principals

- Counselors/School social worker
- Professionals and NGO personnel in the field of student welfare
- Social work educators

From these four different areas of professionals in the NCT of Delhi, four professionals from each area were selected, which totaled to 16.

Social Work Intervention Model

The researcher proposes a social work intervention model based on the findings emerging from the views and experiences from professionals working in the area of student welfare. The social work intervention model is designed to manage examination stress among school students and will be introduced in two phases. This social work intervention model is put forth in the figure in the next page.

I. Prevention phase

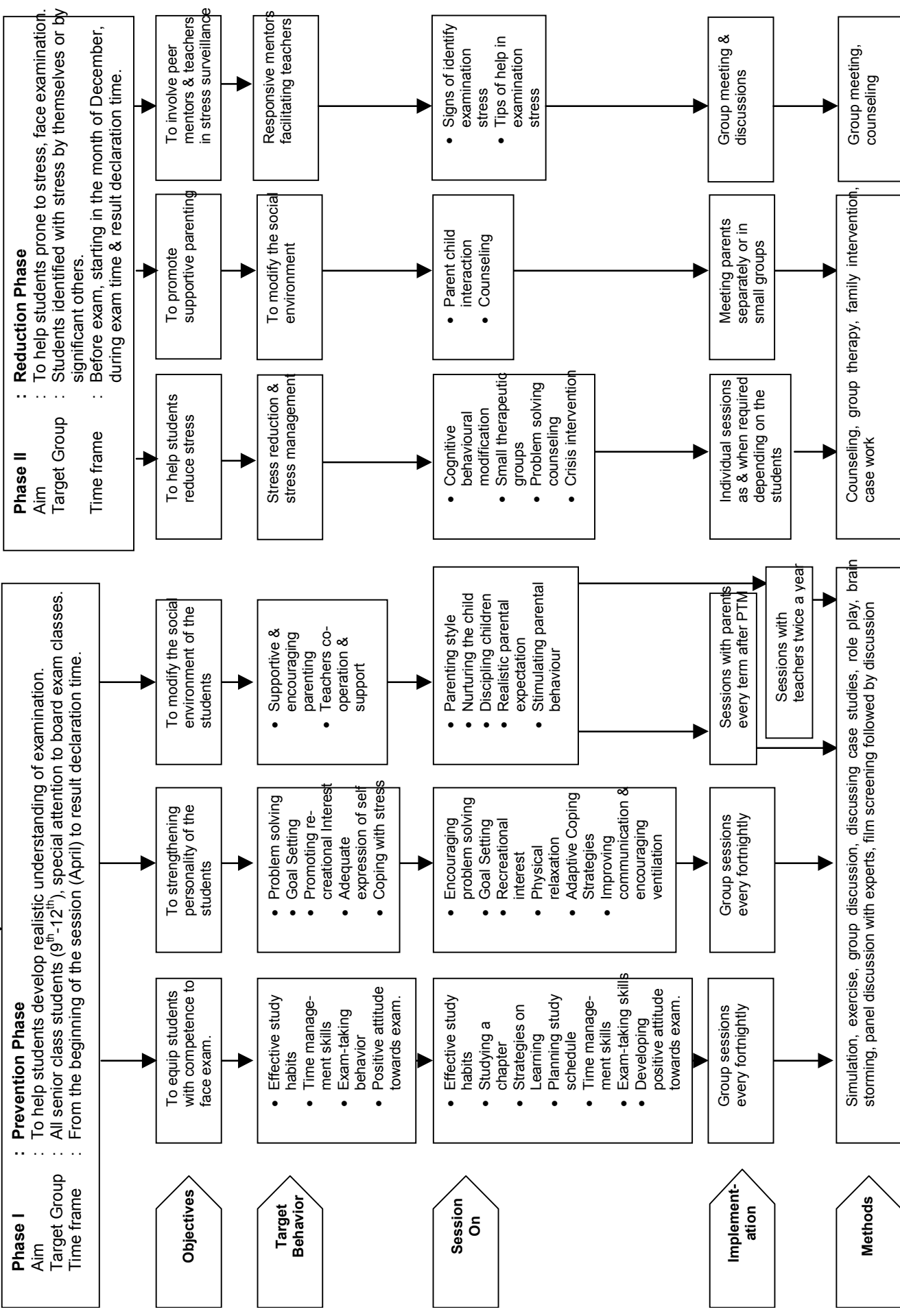
The first phase of this model would be called the prevention phase. The **main aim** of this phase of social work intervention is to help students develop realistic understanding of examination so that students are able to adjust to the demanding situation of examination. The first phase is the primary prevention intervention that promotes healthy behaviour, and reduces the risk of psychosocial disorders because of examination stress.

The **target group** for the prevention phase would be all the students in the senior classes from class IX to XII with special emphasis given to the board classes X and XII. The students would attend the sessions in groups that comprise their class itself. So the group would vary in size from 35 to 55 according to the size of their class.

The **time frame** in this intervention phase would be from the beginning of the academic year, that is, April till the end of the session. The students will meet every fortnightly for sessions that will last for two periods.

The **specific objectives** of the prevention phase are

EXAMINATION STRESS AND SOCIAL WORK INTERVENTION MODEL



- To equip students with competence to face examination.
- To strengthen the personality of the students
- To modify the social environment of the students

First Objective

The first objective of this phase is **to equip students with competence to face examination** so as to build up the capacities of the students and equip them with the competence required to face their examinations. Students lack confidence, doubt their capacities, and are deficit in skills needed for examination. Thus it is important that they are prepared for the examination not just with the subject content but also with a positive mental framework.

Session 1

Effective study habits: The first target behaviour of the model under this particular phase is improving study habits. The session is aimed at helping the students to introspect at their own study habits and understand healthy, effective and adaptive study habits and practices. Efforts should be made to identify how they study and then to find out deficiencies in their study habits that will help them to achieve the highest scholastic performance. Students will be introduced to scientific methods of studying. Students should be flexible in their study behaviour so that they find studying interesting. Studying means to learn the subject matter and prepare for evaluation. The student needs to organize study material, formulate ideas and prepare assignments. Study habits are the combination of ways in which study is done. It includes the pattern of reading, learning, note making.

Session 2

Studying a chapter A popular study habit for reading is the SQ3R technique. The SQ3R technique for preparing a chapter for students would include Survey, Question, Read, Recall, and Review. Survey would mean the students should glance through the chapter, encourage the

questions that arise when one reads through. Read through the text by applying the mind with its critical skills, drawing inferences and reading it again. Recall is retention of what is read. Recall is to improve the learning by better concentration, chance to remedy misinterpretation by loss through memory kept active by summarizing in students own words. Make notes by writing down key points to remember. Review is to remember correctly, viewing again. To go through survey, question, read and recall again.

Session 3

Strategies on learning can be developed by students on how to learn, in the group sessions. Students should be introduced to various strategies of learning and through group activity; students must select a mechanism for themselves.

- Mental Imagery while reading helps to relate new learning to visual images.
- Mnemonics can be used to remember new terms and concepts. Mnemonics are words made up of the first letter of the words of the concepts students are learning.
- Making notes is beneficial. Note making helps to keep active while learning, thus helping concentration. Note making helps in keeping records what was learned.
- Mind maps can be developed by diagram to remember complex concepts.
- Review can help in remembering what is learnt. Review after regular short period, daily, weekly or month is beneficial. This help to transfer learning of short term memory to long term memory.

Session 4

Planning study schedule: Study schedule is organizing studies, for example a student has five important subjects in the X class. When he prepares these subjects, the general tendency is to start with the simpler subjects and move on to the difficult. But it is important to organize subjects in a way that the schedule starts with the most difficult subjects first as concentration is highest in the beginning followed by the easier one. The student should not sit for studies at a stretch for long times but give breaks in between studies. It is important to be flexible in studies so

as to improve concentration. These sessions will be conducted by the school social worker/counselor in a group sitting. The students will be simulated to plan out, study habits appropriate of themselves by group discussions and role play.

Sessions 5

Time management: Time is a precious commodity. Individuals have a variety of activities lined up for the day. Every thing is important and cannot be left out. In time management students have to learn to balance their time between studies, play, friends and entertainment. In today's world there are more distractions for the students. Students need to bargain the time schedule according to the importance of the activity. Individual students can manage time by following these steps like look into their daily time schedule: An hour to hour record will help students find out, how time can be distributed to the daily activities. Organize their time: Make a list of tasks according to its priority; tasks can be listed as most important, important and routine. It is important that the list is looked at the end of the day to find out how the day was spent. Set daily timetable with hourly time distribution: So every hour is given its due importance. Time management skills help to set up practical goals, be organized and systematic, take short breaks to relax and rejuvenate and avoid unnecessary activities. The session on time management would be conducted in-group setting through simple planning exercise, so that students at the end of the session have prepared a daily timetable for themselves.

Session 6

Examination-taking skills: Some students do very well in class but when it comes to examination they don't perform well. This is one of the reasons for examination stress. Students need to develop examination-taking skills. Examination-taking skills can be divided into preparation for examination and examination techniques. Examination preparation is a slow, consistent and a conscious effort made by students. Students need to develop individual timetables for revision covering all subjects and topic. Giving importance to revision, discussion with others, to look up previous question papers to understand the trend and type of questions. Plan out answers and to prepare a sketch answer keeping in mind the marks allotment and time management for each question.

The session would be conducted by a talk with an expert from the field of education/social work/psychiatry/psychology. The talk would be followed by question and answer session. Students would be encouraged to ask questions, from the expert for their own personal problems.

Session 7

Developing positive attitude towards examination: Students need to understand the purpose of examination. Students need to understand that examinations are held to find out how much the students have learned. Examination evaluates the students in the learning process. Examination thus is a tool to judge and promote students to the next level. This session would be put forth, by screening a film highlighting the purpose of examination to develop a positive attitude towards examination. Examples can be shared of famous people, like Albert Einstein, Bill Gates, Tom Cruise, Henry Ford, A R Rahman, Sachin Tendulkar who have achieved great success in their lives, have left a mark in the world by their excellence in the field despite the fact they didn't perform well in school.

Second Objective

The second objective of the prevention phase is **to strengthen the personality of the students**. Students' personality also contributes to the adverse affects of examination stress. So it is important to build up on the students' personality so that they are equipped to face the stress and strains of life.

To achieve this objective, several sessions will be held with students to instill confidence and balanced personality trends.

Session 1

Encouraging problem solving skills: Understanding complex, complicated situations and managing them require good problem solving skills. Problems may seem very difficult, large and overwhelming. Problems make us move back, stop us from progressing. If students just give up, they lose the chance to move ahead in life. Thus it is important for students to have a problem solving nature.

Students will be encouraged to adopt techniques that help analyze the problem, brings student face to face with the problem. Steps to be followed in problem solving are:

- Identify the problem. Write down on a piece of paper the problem faced. This can be elaborated by putting in details like who is involved, when and where does the problem occur.
- Put down the contributory factors to the problem on the paper using lines.

- Analyze the whole picture. See the problem its contributory factors, and look for all possible solutions. Solution is the ability to look for strategies to face the problem, adapt and change the situation.
- Weigh the pros and cons of each solution and select the most suitable one.

In this session the methods to be used are simulation, group discussion and role play. Students in smaller groups can take up discussions on problems that they face and work out a solution systematically.

Session 2

Goal setting: The steps student plans to take to achieve the goals strengthen the student's personality. This session will be to help students set realistic goals and work for accomplishing those goals. The process of setting goals by students helps them choose where they want to go in life. By knowing where to go, students can concentrate efforts to reach the goals. Realistic and reasonable goals can be motivating and the habits of setting and achieving goals, builds up self-confidence of the students. Students in this session are helped to set goals, follow the SMART method of setting goals. A useful way of setting goals is to use the **SMART** Mnemonic. Goals should be **Specific, Measurable, Attainable, Relevant** and **Time-bound**. This makes the goal meaningful, appropriate and students will be motivated to achieve them.

In this session, students are motivated to look ahead, plan their life, and move ahead. This session will be activity-based interaction within the group. Students are encouraged to set up their own goals. For many students this session will make them think of what are their opportunity and how they could plan to reach the goals set by them.

Session 3

Recreational interest: Recreation is very important for students; as it gives opportunity for self-expression, an enjoyment, and an entertainment for them. It was reported that students are deprived of recreational activities in school and at home, in the senior classes especially the board classes. The school converts the students' sports, dramatic and extra-curricular periods to study classes. The students are not given the time to relax and to recreate. Even at home parents cut off their hobbies, friends, playtime and television time. In this **session** students are allowed to externalize their interests. Through the method of play, students relax, laugh and enjoy. Play activities are organized.

Session 4

Physical relaxation techniques are introduced to students. These are effective in reducing stress. Simple physical relaxation technique of deep breathing and progressive muscular relaxation will help students reduce stress. **Deep breathing** is a simple, effective method of relaxation. Take a number of deep breaths and relax your body, with each breath feel the body unwind and relax more and more. Continue this for two-five minutes and observe the body relax. **Progressive muscular relaxation** is useful for relaxing the body when the muscles are tense. In the progressive muscular relaxation a group of muscles are tensed up tightly, contracted, held in this state of extreme tension for a few seconds. Then, the muscles are relaxed to the normal position; again consciously relax the same muscles even further. Follow this with the different limbs, neck, shoulder and abdomen. Slowly the individual's body is relaxed.

Session 5

Coping strategies can be of two kinds, task oriented and emotion oriented. Task-Oriented are those in which the problem in the environment or the situation causing the stress is planned for change. The Emotion-Oriented strategies are those in which it is difficult to change the situation/environment so stress is managed by changing the interpretation of the situation and how students feel about it.

The students are helped in examination stress by task-oriented coping strategies as organizing study, improving examination-taking skills, as these will help them cope to the difficult situations. Emotion-oriented coping strategies will help students manage the stress during examination time with these efforts. Now students have to relax and perform in examination without fearing about the result. Coping with stress is to acknowledge stress in our lives, and to consciously control the stress by adopting coping strategies.

This **session** would be conducted by panel discussion with experts giving tips on relaxing, followed by question and answer session. So students are helped with individual problems.

Session 6

Improving communication and encouraging ventilation: Students need to express their opinions, desires, needs and fears verbally and non-verbally. This could also include clarifying their doubts and asking for advice and help. It is important that students have communicable

relationship with friend, parents and teachers. Free flow of information, opinions and views is necessary for the development of a healthy personality. Session will be held to help students improve their communication skills. Student should be encouraged to talk out their feelings, views and experiences. This **ventilation** in the presence of an empathic listener is therapeutic. The listener could be the school social worker/counselor/teacher or peer. There is a need for an attentive listener with concern and care. Ventilation can be very beneficial to reduce examination stress like an old saying “a problem shared is a problem halved”. This ventilation session can be conducted by group simulation, group discussion and sharing. The students can improve communication and ventilate pent up feeling among their classmates.

Third Objective

The third objective of the Prevention Phase is **to modify the social environment**. Students have attributed examination stress to their parents’ behaviour, expectation and the family environment. Teachers also contribute to examination stress by their behaviour and expectation. To prevent student from examination stress it is important to modify the surrounding of the students. Parents play an important role in the life of students. Parenting is a challenging task. To be an effective parent, parenting should be based on security and attachment, which incorporates attitudes, emphasising on playfulness, acceptance, curiosity and empathy. There should never be room for coercion, threat, intimidation and the use of power to force submission.

Supportive and encouraging parenting: Parents target behaviour towards students must be supportive and encouraging for this the parents must be involved into the social work intervention model. Most parents are interested in the betterment of their child. To make parents effective, sessions need to be held with parents. Session should cover issues of parenting style and its effect on the children, discipline children, nurturing children with help and support.

Session 1

Parenting style: Session on parenting styles would be very beneficial for the parents. There are generally four styles of parenting: authoritarian, permissive, neglectful and authoritative. Most parents do not fall solely into one of the category but are in the middle, have some features of the different style. Some parents also change styles with changes in age, experience, and maturity level of the child.

This session would help parents to improve their parenting. Teaching the parents how to behave and making them realize the result of their parenting would be very beneficial. A panel of experts from the field would conduct the session. Parents would be given detailed information on the topic followed by a question answer sessions so that parents get a chance to discuss the problems they face and how to handle their day to day problems with children.

Session 2

Nurturing the Child: A nurturing parent is a loving, understanding and supportive parent. Children learn more from them than a harsh parent. Children of a nurturing parent are less prone to delinquency than children of rejecting parents. Nurturing parents are helpful, they convey to the children that they are valued, believed, trusted, children can handle life situation, they are listened to, cared for, they are very important to parents. Parents need to confide in children and children can tell everything to parents, and that parents are learning with children.

The session of nurturing will be conducted with parents through group sharing and discussion. This session helps the parents deal with many of the blocks faced by parents like generation gap. Efforts to improve communication between parents and children would be encouraged.

Session 3

Disciplining Children: Disciplining is crucial as it promotes children's self-control, teaches them responsibility, and helps them to make conscious choices. Helping children achieve self-discipline is very important. It lays the foundation for children's life-long personal and social development. Family experts say using physical force or threats can interfere with child's healthy development. Effective guidance and discipline focus on the development of the child, preserving the child's self esteem and dignity. Actions that recognize the child's efforts and progress encourage healthy development. Some positive steps to prevent misbehaviour are to set clear consistent rules, show interest in child's activities, provide engaging playthings, provide stimulating environment, encourage self-control by meaningful choices, focus on desired behaviour, rather than the one to be avoided, expect the best from the child, say 'yes' whenever possible, take action before situation is out of control, encourage children and give clear directions. These are some examples.

This session with parents would be held by discussing case studies and group discussion on methods of enabling children.

Session 4

Realistic Parental Expectation: The target behaviour of the parents must be realistic parental expectations from their children. It is quite natural for parents to expect the best for their children but it is difficult for the children to live up to their parental expectations if the demands are too high. Parents must have expectation from their children that are equal to their capacities. Parents must not aim very high. There should be a two ways communication between parents and children on the expectations from both sides to strike balance.

Session should be organized with parents on delinking parental expectation and aspirations with the results. Parents must not be too demanding of their children. Parents must delink the expectation with the results. Goals should be set children should be encouraged, supported to meet these goal but too much of emphasis on academic result will pressurize the child and cause examination stress. If the parents' expectations are too high, unreachable the child would just abandon it. If the expectations are attainable the child will work hard for meeting them. So to avoid the ill effects of examination stress, parents must be realistic in their parental expectations.

Session 5

Stimulating Parental Behaviour: The target behaviour of the parents must be stimulating for the child. Parents play a very important role in the achievements of the children. Parental behaviour must be stimulating to encourage the child to the right home environment so that the child can play, concentrate, work hard, keep distraction away at the same time, enjoy, relax, recreate, share his views. Parents are eager to help but need the right direction.

The democratic parenting style will help parents to understand that children need their freedom but its also important to be firm with them too, parents must be besides the children helping them out in making their own right choices. A balance between over-protectiveness and laissez-faire style of parenting needs to be maintained. It's important to create a conducive study environment for the child. The students' roles and responsibility must be shared by other family members, so that the student feels the importance of their studies. Children can study better in an environment that is free from distractions avoid studying near a window, or in a room with television on. Children must have a place for themselves, a corner of a room where they can study, put his study materials. So that students can organize themselves. The room where the child

studies must have good lighting, proper ventilation allowing fresh air, proper adequate furniture, clear desk, comfortable chair and shelves for storage.

Session on transferring roles and responsibilities to other family members and making the required changes to accommodate the child's examinations will encourage the child. Small steps taken by parents can motivate the child. Parents can also help the child in organizing their study. Work out a time table for the child, schedule study, emphasizing on revision and play into his daily activities, as regular physical exercise is necessary for the child even in the examination time. Physical exercise for the student, relieve tension and helps to relax.

Sessions on stimulating parental behaviour can be conducted by filming a movie on parental behaviour followed by group sharing and discussions where parents' queries are handled. Parent have their doubts and problem, that can be helped out by discussion and listening to the parents and giving them tips on managing their behaviour and conduct with children.

Teachers Cooperation and Support

Teachers are one of the significant others' that leave deep impressions on the child's mind. Teachers are in constant contact with the children and any signs of examination stress can be observed first by the teachers. Teachers are key persons who can also predict before anyone else that a particular student is showing signs of pressure and is suffering from or is liable to suffer from examination stress. Sessions with teachers on children's needs, behavioural problems in children will help teachers identify students with problems, especially examination stress. Sessions on positive disciplining of students will help the teachers handle students in the classroom setting. Sessions will also be held with teachers on stress management, so that there is an environment of mental well-being in the school.

Session with teachers twice a year by experts followed by discussion on case studies can help teachers to be sensitized to students' problem. Sessions with parents can be planned out every term on the parents-teacher-meeting (PTM) day. Parents can be brought together in the school hall or in one of the classes to hold these sessions. Parents must be involved in these sessions from the planning stage itself. Regular correspondence, taking their views will keep the parents involved and create a friendly environment in the school.

II. Stress Reduction Phase

The phase II of the social work intervention model is examination stress reduction phase. At phase II the social work intervention **aims** to help students who are affected by examination stress. This is specifically for students who need special attention more than the other students. The **target groups** are students identified with stress symptoms, by themselves or by the significant others could be parents, peer or teachers. Those who are physically close to the students and who observe behavioural problems in the students. The **time frame** for the Phase II will be before the examination starts in the month of December, few months before the final examination.

These students have already been a part of the prevention phase but the students have not been able to control the stress before examination. The students need more help. The **specific objectives** of this reduction phase are to help students reduce stress, to promote supportive parenting and to involve peer mentors and teachers in stress surveillance

First Objective

The first objective is **to help student reduce their stress**. The school social worker/counselor plans out stress management and reduction sessions. These sessions will reduce stress by management in an eclectic approach combining mainly behavioural, cognitive-behavioural and supportive components.

The behavioural approaches focus on change in observable behaviour or behaviour modification. These approaches are based on the concept that psychological problems occur due to learning or conditioning and can be undone by the same processes. The school social work/counselors can help the students. Anxiety can be managed by methods of deep breathing, progressive muscle relaxation, and meditation. These help in relaxing the students. Deep breathing is an effective exercise that relaxes the individual. Followed by simple steps of taking in breath (inhaling), holding the breath inside the lungs and then exhaling. These steps of inhale, holding the breath and exhale is repeatedly done very slowly for 5 to 10 minutes. Progressive muscle relaxation is tightening the muscles, holding it in this tightened position and then relaxing the muscle, one by one of the various parts of body, especially hands and legs. Meditation is another technique to relax the mind. In this the individual sits in a quite place, eyes closed and concentrates at a point for 20 minutes. The mind drift away from the point to various thought and the attempt is to keep on seeing or thinking of that point. Initially a difficult task slowly the mind learns to meditate. Students can also be helped by systematic desensitization. Students that experience distress in examination times feel various emotional and physical problems. Classical conditioning can be

used to relax the body in systematic desensitization as the students are encouraged to face the exams with support. Repeated examination situation makes the students more confident in going through the process of examination.

The Cognitive approaches are important in reducing examination stress as it is the students' negative perceptions towards examination and examination results that needs to be treated. These therapeutic approaches are also called cognitive restructuring. Rational-Emotive therapy of Albert Ellis is one of the earliest cognitive-restructuring approaches. This assumes that individuals have rational and irrational tendencies. The irrational thoughts prevent from reaching the goals results in inner conflict and mental tension. This causes emotional difficulties in students, this irrational thoughts cause examination stress and fear of failure. Person centered counseling helps students build up a more realistic thinking. Meichenbaum's self-instructional training is another method of the cognitive approach. Meichenbaum uses self-instructional training to help students replace their maladaptive cognitions with rational, positive thinking in an examination situation.

The Cognitive Behavioural Approach is most suited to treat examination stress as it's a combination of restructuring the cognition of the students and help in stress reduction trainings. The target behaviour for this objective will be stress reduction by stress management and coping to the stress by adaptive coping. The sessions for this objective will be in small therapeutic groups and through individual problem-solving counseling. These groups work and case work sessions will be organized twice in a week and if need be more sessions would be conducted.

Small Therapeutic Group: The students facing examination stress problems are collected in small groups to help them out in adaptive coping strategies. The aim is to support these students to work out their own adaptive coping strategies. Group session will help them work out solutions for themselves. Here students form support groups helping out each other. Ventilating their problems to each other so that they know that there are other students too, who feel their way. There are common emotions of fear, low self esteem in the group, which the students feel they were suffering alone so the interactions with other students would be advantageous. The group sessions will help the students support each other.

Problem Solving Counseling: Problem solving counseling is a structured and systematic method of interaction with client to recognize the problems or the stressors in their lives and then adopt steps to tackle these problems. Problem-solving counseling is a double-headed approach that is it tackles the emotional and the practical aspects of the problem. The emotional problem is tackled first and then the client is in a better frame of mind to solve his problems.

Crisis intervention requires specialized skills and experience dealing with crisis. The ability to assess and intervene during emergencies is a challenging skill. Incorrect assessment, missed opportunities, unskillful behaviour and mistakes can prolong a crisis, create new problems or turn an urgent problem into a dangerous emergency. Some skills required by the school social work/counselor are that they can be reached seven days a week and twenty-four hours a day if necessary. They are sensitive, good listeners and are prepared to give time to the students. In most circumstances, the difficulties that students face can be addressed through the usual process. However, there are circumstances when crisis situation occur in which immediate or same day intervention by counselor is called for. Counselors can help by providing an objective frame of reference within which the crisis can be considered, there can be a discussion of possible alternative, to promote healthy functioning and to obtain commitment from the students.

Second Objective

The second objective of the Stress Reduction Phase is **to promote supportive parenting** for students experiencing examination stress. Students were observed pressurized due to the examination situation and the results of this study also states that parent help and support was very beneficial to students. Parents have already been addressed in sessions after the PTM in the Phase I to prevent the examination stress to occur. But as examination stress has been observed among the students. Parents of those student's who face the problem, will be again met and involved in the treatment process, so that the stress condition can be controlled and reduced.

Session 1

Parent-child-interaction: The parents of students will be met in small groups to discuss the parent-child relationship. Parent child interaction of students in senior classes is a fragile relationship. There is a binding between the parent-child and a lot of differences of opinion too. Most parent-child relationship has their ups and downs. This relationship is important to us as this sometimes affect the children's personality. The sessions will be held on parent-child relationship. Parents interact with their children in the way they think is right. They encounter avoidance, defensiveness, resistance and even hostility from their wards. Parents become confused they sometimes give up, they get frustrated in their interaction with their child, sometimes parent-child dialogue take the form of power struggles and conflict also. Parents may also begin to disagree to each other, when parents argue about what to do; children think that parents don't know what they are doing. Parents lose credibility in front of their own children.

Parents will be met in **counseling session** to understand the students problems and for family therapy so that the parent-child relationship is strengthened. Family therapy will facilitate the social worker/counselor to identify family patterns that contribute to behavioural disorder or mental illness. This therapy helps members to break those habits that cause the problem. Family therapy involves discussion and problem solving sessions with the family as a whole or one to one with members having the problem. Family therapy sessions will help in strengthening communication patterns within the family. Thus address the causes of examination stress from home and parents that affect the students.

Third Objective

Peer mentors and teachers in examination stress surveillance: The third objective of Phase II of the social work intervention model is to involve peer mentors and teachers in examination stress surveillance. Peers are another important groups of the significant others who are directly in touch with the students. Students who are sensitive towards children's issues and who show interest, those students will be trained as peer mentors from each class and will form a core group. The sessions that will be taken up with the volunteered peer mentors will introduce them to the phenomena of examination stress

- Signs to identify examination stress among students.
- Tips to help in time management, effective study habits, organizing study and examination taking.

Peer mentor refer students to teachers/school social worker/counselor, when they identify students need help. The peer mentor core group will disseminate the session information to other students and thus all the senior class students are covered. Peer mentor will be on surveillance for their class, looking out for students who are having problem in studies and are tensed and worried about their performance. The responsive peer mentor, thus form a link between service providers and students who need help. The peer mentors will be in constant touch with the school social worker/counselor. If they identify students deteriorating in studies or with strange behaviour, like high absenteeism, loneliness, these students will be brought to the notice of the school social worker/counselor.

Teachers are in constant interaction with the students, so they will also be involved in the surveillance team. Teachers too will be sensitized to identify and help students getting stressed with examination or study pressures. Teachers will deal with the students in class and if need be, teachers will bring these students to the notice of the school social worker/counselor if they find students unable to manage the examination stress.

Feedback session should be held at all phases with all the different groups of students and significant others. These feedback sessions should be arranged with the school social worker and general students, parents, peer mentors, teacher and with students suffering from increased examination stress. The feed back sessions would be supportive and would act as a safety net covering all the students. So that there is always help close by and there are no cases of student neglect because of increased examination stress.

This model is an attempt to prevent examination stress among all the senior school students and to reduce the examination stress that has been diagnosed among school students. This model if introduced in all school it will be very beneficial to reduce and arrest examination stress and its ill effects on school students.

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