

EXPRESS **Newsline**

# Boards or no Boards, exam stress affects all

**A recent study by Max Healthcare finds students of classes IX and XI severely stressed; parents' expectations, peer pressure major reasons**

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IF you think your child needs 'special' attention only when faced with the big bad Board exams, think again. A new study covering 2,000 students in the city has revealed that very high levels of stress develop in exam-taking students in general — not just those taking Board exams. Stress levels are especially high among students of classes IX and XI.

The study further finds that major causes of stress originate from the most familiar faces: stifling expectations from parents and comparisons with close friends.

A study conducted by Max Healthcare's Department of Mental Health and Behavioural Sciences, headed by Chief Psychiatrist Samir Parikh dismantles the myth that only Boards students experience performance-related stress. The study instead finds that a majority of students in classes IX to XII are depressed: a staggering 48 per cent among boys and 50 per cent of girls from classes IX to XII feel that teachers and parents constantly remind them that they need to work 'longer and harder', with an additional 26 per cent feeling a moderate amount of pressure.

Friends are small consolation, with levels of competition being very high: 40 per cent of boys and girls strongly felt that they needed to be constantly in touch with their friends to compare their own progress, while an additional 16 per cent among boys and girls experienced this moderately.

Students also pick up a host of unhealthy habits, like missing sleep (20 per cent students) and missing large meals and opting for snacks instead (25 per cent). More than 30 per cent of children felt that they would be deemed failures if they did not score more

than 80 per cent in their exams.

"There are many myths associated with study patterns and exams that need to be dispelled. This study proves, for example, that it is not only students studying for their Boards who feel exam-related stress, which is a real problem," says Dr Parikh.

The study, a part of the pro-social peer programme conducted by Max Hospital, sampled 944 boys and 1,056 girls from schools in Delhi. To get students to open up and discuss study-related problems, the survey asked for their ages, and not the classes they were studying in.

"We as a society have demonised exams. As a result, students feel pre-emptive stress, meaning a fear of failure even before the failure. Students in classes IX and XI start feeling the pressure of being in Boards classes even before getting there. The child should be instilled with the zeal to perform. We need to focus on performance orientation, and not result orientation," he says.

The solution lies not in comparison, but in looking at the child as an individual entity. "When a child gets compared, his focus on himself as a person dissolves. Parents need to tell the child that he/she should be performance-oriented, not result-oriented. Results are a product of performance, after all," Parikh says.

## Nightmare before the exams

- The survey found that 7 out of 100 boys and 5 out of 100 girls find taking medication like memory pills an essential and viable option
- 40% of students felt they never have 'enough' time to cover the course material
- 40% felt they would get 'bad' results even though they felt they had done well in the exams