



WISDOMTOOTH

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Stress of the Zoom times

One of the programmes that suddenly came to light in the new normal is Zoom. Although just one of such platforms like Teams, Hangout, Skype, and even Discord, it has become synonymous to all these service providers letting people hold meetings with audio and video calling -- much like xerox was to photocopy, or in Bangladesh, Honda is to a motorbike.

But just as Zoom or online synchronised video meetings became the saviours of productivity and collaboration at many businesses, academic institutions, corporate houses and so on and so forth, it also revealed a highly potent, and often unexpected, stress point. The phenomena gained so much traction that social scientists have given it a name-- Zoom Fatigue.

Although it is a new subject, but thanks to the boosted use and larger -- a worldwide -- availability of observable subjects, Zoom fatigue can be described as a sense of boredom and detachment and a sense of overall tiredness which may or may not lead to reluctance and anxiety.

Interacting with people throughout the day and working on various things is a part of all of our lives. We have been living a certain way, and our brains and bodies have adapted to the environmental cues and stressors, responding in suitable ways. However, as humanity adapts to the newer version of normal life, with fewer in-person interactions replaced by more and more online ones, we miss out on a lot of the peripheral cues as well as support systems

that were built up over the long years. This new change can be seriously difficult for many people, especially introverts, and of course, children of various ages.

Even as the fact remains that those schools which have been able to launch online classes are few, and the children and teachers fortunate in a sense, there are a lot of challenges in adapting, and Zoom Fatigue is definitely not the least of them. Typical causes of this fatigue can be the sheer number of meetings that people sit through daily, the physical fatigue of sitting for long periods looking in the same direction, and being distracted by unrelated things happening in the proximal physical environment.

So how does this fatigue manifest? Typically, in bursts of reluctance and physical tiredness, and inability or severe disinclination towards work and scheduled meetings are obvious symptoms. For children or students who are taking online classes, signs of boredom, losing focus, being late repeatedly, not finishing/submitting work, not speaking up, etc. can all be tell-tale signs.

So what can be done about it?

First and foremost, the issue needs to be acknowledged. As important as these online meetings are, and as relaxed as they may appear compared to hectic schedules of running to offices, colleges and schools etc, they do cause a certain type of fatigue, which has to be dealt with.

To help everyone cope with Zoom Fatigue a little bit better, a more human

touch needs to be added to the interactions mindfully. Genuinely ask and care about each other's wellbeing, especially if the attendees are your students.

Adults often have support networks we know to access, but children may struggle more with expressing these feelings, even simply from the lack of understanding the cause of the stress.

Adding a bit of levity, joy, or simply talking about something unrelated to lessons for a little while can help break the monotony and help to achieve better focus



for the rest of the lessons.

For more adult settings, consider if the targets can be achieved without the meeting. "This could have been an email" is something we have all muttered in our heads at some point in many a meeting-- ensure that this is not the case while scheduling your next one on Zoom.

Keeping each session as short as possible is another aspect, and creating a clear agenda, or in case of teaching, a lesson target for the day, is equally important.

Also, as in real life, the loudest mouths often drown out the other voices in Zoom meetings. While it is somewhat easier to draw attention in a physical environment, as teachers or supervisors it becomes more important to ensure participation by even the quieter members of the team, even if it is just to elicit a "hello" back, as it makes people feel seen and acknowledged. It is also possible to encourage participants to move a bit or stand up, slide the camera to a side-view position, turn off the camera for a short while, to help deal with the constant stress of being visible or looking at oneself.

But most importantly, understanding and kindness are key. To quote, we are not all working from home, we are in a crisis, trying to stay safe confined at home, and trying to work. Thinking that everybody has the same privileges is naive at best, and more likely just cruel. Not all homes have conducive environments, not every woman or man has the same support or responsibilities at home -- some have toddlers, some have ailing elders -- most have multiple roles and little to no help. And others have conditions which we may not be aware of.

If you are one of those that are lucky to have all the help in the world, think about those who don't, support more, judge less, and let everyone of us take each day of this crisis one day at a time, one breath in, one breath out.

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