

Breaking Point: A Case Study of an Indian Army Sepoy

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Abstract: The breaking point refers to the point at which a person breaks down, can endure no more, or finally reaches a point where a permanent change is made. This is typically related to stressful or highly emotional situations, in which a person will be forced to cope with something that particularly challenges them. The breaking point for each individual person may be different; some people respond particularly well to stressful situations, while others have a much lower point at which a situation becomes too much to endure. Vikrant had been a devoted army sepoy. Being a Rajput from Rajasthan, the commitment and chivalry of this soldier was exemplary. However, life took a different turn for him when he found himself under stress and delusion, which was caused by his wife's perceived infidelity. Vikrant could not bear the brunt of his personal life being ruined and rushed to death in haste. The focus of the case is Breaking Point (not related to work/organization), its effect on an individual and role of the organisation to prevent such incidents.

Key words: breaking point, aroused emotions, coping behavior, intrapersonal conflict, taxonomy of conflict, optimum stress,

I. Introduction

The management of human resources in today's fast changing world has acquired new dimensions due to the complex inter play of social, environmental, biological and cultural factors, affecting human behavior. The family values of yester years are anachronisms today. The concept of modernity being practiced by our society has manifested itself in terms of renewed cultural beliefs, social standards, gender equality, peer pressure, inter personal conflict and raised aspiration conflict. The men in Armed forces have been hit the hardest by its effects due to peculiar service conditions. The prolonged separations, inability to be with the family at the time of distress and indifferent attitude of relatives to their genuine problems, adds to their agony. Those who are unable to cope up with this paradigm shift suffer from unbearable stress leading to their break point.

II. Breaking point—An overview

Sepoy Vikrant Singh was a Rajput from Barmer district of Rajasthan. This district has significantly and traditionally contributed many of its sons to the Indian Army and his unit was no exception having a sizeable proportion of soldiers from this region. The joint family of Sepoy Vikrant Singh comprised of his grand-parents, parents, one elder and one younger brother and a sister younger to him. His father was a farmer, elder brother serving in a Rajput Battalion and younger brother studying. His elder brother was married in a Rajput family, the match arranged by his grandparents. The wife of elder brother was staying with in-laws and did not accompany her husband. The sister was educated up to class six and then married. The family had limited exposures to modern value sand was rigid in following traditions and put 'Honour & Prestige' of the family above everything else.

The early education of Sep. Vikrant Singh was from a school in his village till class X. He did his Class XII from Barmer staying in a hostel. Sep. Vikrant Singh was of sober habits and got a limited exposure to urban life before he joined the Army on 15 March 2005.

Sep Vikrant Singh was a good soldier and an excellent sportsman. He was of quiet nature and fond of reading and studies. He had been a likeable person. He stood first in the inter-unit Marathon Race Competition in February 2007. Life took a different turn when he met with a girl named Veena in March 2008 during leave at Jodhpur and got enamored with her due to her 'forwardness'. Though they belonged to same community from Rajasthan but her grandparents had moved out from rural areas of Rajasthan and started living in city. Her father was working in a Bank. The family had adopted urban ways of living, and followed a mix of traditional and modern value system. They gave good education to their children and encouraged their children, even girls to mingle freely with everyone, though within limits. Veena was the second child of four children and had studied in co- education school. She was a good looking girl with an extrovert and trusting nature and was a popular student in her school and college due to her pleasing disposition, positive attitude and good manners. Much against the wishes of his parents, Vikrant married the girl on 12 July, 2009. After the marriage, the young couple

stayed together for two months. Like his elder brother, he had to leave his wife with his parents; she did not protest and quickly endeared herself to everyone in the family. She treated his younger brother as her own brother and started helping him in his studies.

After the marriage, Vikrant came home on leave twice. He had returned to unit after a fortnight's leave in February 2010. However, this time, it was noticed that he had become quiet and withdrawn since his return and had not responded to queries about well-being of his family. He just mentioned that he was not feeling well. His colleagues assumed he was homesick and missing his wife as he had applied for a few days casual leave again for a week in March, which had been sanctioned by the sub-unit commander but he could not go on leave due to training commitments in the unit, and committed suicide on 11 March.

Triggering effect

Hailing from a rural background, Sepoy Vikrant Singh got married to a modern woman. She was an extrovert. But Sepoy Vikrant Singh could not cope with the openness and frank behavior of his wife with the opposite sex. In February 2010 when he had proceeded on leave; he got suspicious of his wife's closeness to her brother-in-law. A trivial action of his wife had sown suspicion in his mind. Thereafter, he had started inquiring about her college days and background. Due to her free and frank nature, Vikrant felt his wife had loose morals. Despite her denials, he used to brood over each and every action of his wife and related it to her having illicit relations with her brother-in-law. He did not change the nomination of his 'Will' in her name. He used to pen down his conflicting thoughts, questions and justifications in every spare minute he got. Being from the proud Rajput caste he could not share his agony with his peers or superiors. On the fateful night, in his last phone call to her, he wanted a final admission of her relations with her paramour and a promise from her to break it off, which never came. He decided to pull the trigger in haste.

Sequence of Events

It had been a very delightful and satisfying evening albeit a very late one for Col IM Smart, Commanding Officer of an Army unit. He had just retired to bed after an inter-active function which was a follow up of a successful culmination of a training event in his unit. He was informed at about midnight by the duty officer, "Sir, Sepoy Vikrant Singh has shot himself".

He rushed to the spot where the ghastly incident had occurred. Sepoy Vikrant Singh was lying dead in a pool of blood with his rifle beside him near the southern guard post of the building. The Military Police and civil Police also had arrived and had started the investigations.

Sepoy Vikrant Singh was on duty from 0001h to 0200h along with Sepoy B Chandra. Sepoy Chandra said that he had seen Vikrant Singh only a few moments back during change-over of guard and had not found anything wrong. He mentioned he had definitely seen Vikrant Singh speaking on the mobile phone while patrolling. At about 0010h, he had suddenly heard a gunshot and had rushed to the site to find Vikrant Singh lying in a pool of blood.

Status Report

An Inquiry was ordered to investigate the incident. The Presiding Officer started interacting with various people, firstly to ascertain if there was any foul play, which was not the case he found. Simultaneously, he started to investigate into the circumstances which may have led to the suicide by Vikrant including the organizational climate, Standing Operating Procedures, of the unit which had some lacunae, he felt. He also found that the guard was not homogenous, i.e. from the same sub-unit but a mix of personnel from all the other subunits.

Vikrant had not been interviewed by the Sub-unit Commander or the Commanding Officer prior to going on leave or on return. Linking the statements of his best buddy and the data of profusion of late night calls by Vikrant on the mobile phone to his wife, the last being about fifteen minutes before his pulling the trigger, Officer conducting the Inquiry concluded something was amiss. He interviewed all the persons in the chain of command but was stymied to find there was no information about his marital relations. Even his best buddy who had attended his marriage was unaware of any discord. He had been getting leave as per his choice and requirements. But the Sub-unit Commander had noted that lately the performance of Vikrant Singh had dropped down. He had come 10th in the Inter Unit Marathon race Competition. Also, he had not performed so well in the Promotion examination despite being studious. The sub unit Clerk also mentioned that Vikrant had been dilly dallying with his marriage documentation and had not given the necessary photos and details for publishing the 'Will' almost for six months. Therefore, prior to Vikrant departure for a fortnight's leave in the previous month, he had pointed this to the Sub-unit commander who in turn had instructed Vikrant to do the needful work before coming back from leave. The 'Will' was finally published on Vikrant's return.

Luckily, for the Investigating Officer, a few days later one person came to meet him. He turned out to be a soldier from Vikrant's village who was posted to another unit in the same station. He narrated that there was

some marital discord between Vikrant and his wife as she was 'modern'. He had inquired about it from him but no response was forthcoming. The soldier mentioned that Vikrant was fond of writing and used to maintain a diary in which he used to pen down his daily life. The Investigating officer immediately ordered search for the missing diary. A search of personal belongings of Vikrant yielded his personal diary, on flicking through them, he found himself staring at heart rending pages filled with Vikrant's personal mental and emotional turmoil, torment and agony. Vikrant Singh was tortured by suspicions about his wife's fidelity soon after his marriage which had manifested in out pouring sin the diary during the free hours.

Teaching Notes

Case Synopsis

The case details about Vikrant Singh, an Indian army Sepoy who committed suicide due to undue stress. Most stress situations, we meet in daily life are minor and easy to cope with. However, at times, we face highly stressful situations or accumulated stresses, which are difficult to cope with and result in strain, primarily on the mind. In some individuals, this strain crosses the threshold of tolerance and they face a breakdown. Alleged increase in the cases of suicides, fratricides, stress related physical disorders and psychiatric illnesses has been a cause of concern for the Military leadership. (Rigalli V.S.S.R., Bhat, P.S. & Srivastava, Kalpana, 2011) and to this end, the deeper study into the various facets of stress will assist commanders at all levels to understand this psychological factor of human relations. Another factor is the organizational behavior, which plays a major factor in prevention of such kinds of situation. For personnel in the Armed Forces, stress is of special significance as a soldier has to confront stress at all times in some form or the other. It was under prolonged stress that Vikrant's response to stress resulted in his death. He also had begun behaving illogically and irrationally. With the help of a case study this paper tries to understand effect of intra personal conflict on performance and behavior pattern, relationship between stresses at home and its psychosocial aspects and systematic analysis of the stress factors to arrive at the root cause of the manifested behavior/ attitude.

Learning objectives

- (a) Effect of intra personal conflict on performance and behavior pattern,
- (b) Relationship between stress at home and its psychosocial aspects,
- (c) Systematic analysis of the stress factors to arrive at the root cause of the manifested behaviour/attitude,
- (d) Some organizational factors affecting stress.

Intended courses/Theories

- (a) Organizational Behavior
- (b) Human Resources and NLP
- (c) Psychology and Studies of Human Relations School.

Questions for Discussion

1. What are the various levels of conflicts army personnel have to bear with in their army life?
2. What are the sources of stress? How could Vikrant cope with such a stress?
3. Explain the optimum stress level in the case of Sepoy Vikrant Singh?
4. What does research say about psychological breakpoint of an individual?
5. What is the relevance of Self Esteem and Social needs with Stress?
6. What were the changes in the behavior of Sep Vikrant Singh due to Stress?
7. What is the role of Organization's Climate & social support system in containing Stress levels?

Teaching plan

The case should be handed over to scholars a week in advance with a request to study and develop a deeper understanding of all issues encompassing Stress Management. Suggested time plan is as under:-

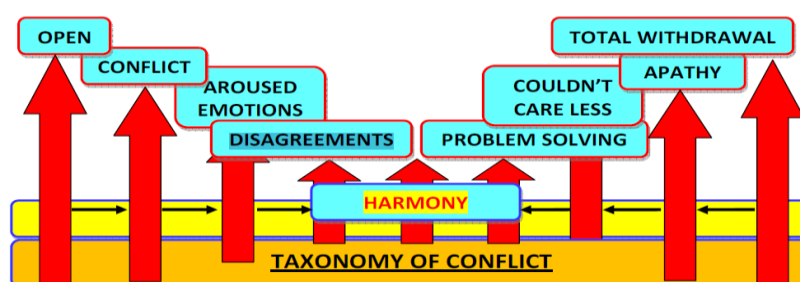
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|---|-------|
| 1. Briefing about the case by Faculty: | 05min |
| 2. Distribution of groups comprising of two to three participants based on specialisation mix | 15min |
| 3. Comparing Learning /objectives by individually attending the discussion in each group. | 10min |
| 5. Faculty intervention on learning process | 05min |
| 6. Case Chronology (Open discussions in groups) | 10min |
| 7. Learning outcome (find out from each group, then discuss in class) | 10min |
| 8. Faculty to moderate discussion on Imbroglia by giving one option to each group | 30min |
| 9. Responses by each group, slide 5-6points; 3 minutes each with query session | 20min |
| 10. Instructor-Brief over view of responses by groups and relaying theory | 25min |

III. Suggested Answers To Questions For Discussion

1. What are the various levels of conflicts army personnel have to bear within their army life?

Truly a conflict represents a gap, a disagreement, contradiction and incompatibility or a tense situation created by the complications in one's life and partially due to organizational apathy. Conflict is an inevitable part of individual and organizational life having divergent personalities, perceptions and values. Conflict can be at three different levels. An intra-personal conflict occurs within the individual. It normally occurs when there is a disagreement between how a person feels about his / her behavior versus how they really act. An inter personal conflict is experienced between individuals in the same location, e.g., co-workers, team members or as in this case between the husband and wife. It exists whenever people interact or come together to accomplish a common goal or objective. However their background, personality and experiences, being different, may make attainment of the goal difficult. An intra-group conflict is defined as conflict between groups in the same organization. It occurs whenever there is contact or interaction between groups. Issues of group cohesion, "sticking together, leadership and status, power or influence and lack of or limited resources" often cause sources of inter group conflict. Lack of goal clarity or intense competition may cause intra-group conflict. This was however absent in this case. Conflict is a natural condition of human life and one of the states of dynamic human personality. A state of harmony is the ideal state. The taxonomy of conflict as shown in Figure1 depicts the conflict to apathy continuum.

Figure1-Taxonomy of Conflict



During the analysis of conflict, the first step is to recognize the level of conflict, from where will flow out the further course of resolution. Vikrant had been facing an intra-personal conflict. Intrapersonal conflict is purely internal to a person and is probably the most difficult type of conflict to analyze. All of us have needs which form the basis for behavior at work, at home and every activity we pursue. Intra personal conflict arising due to unfulfilled expectations, colored perception and hurt to self-esteem and image increases the stress level. Also, the three types of roles, namely, the expected, the perceived and the actual role can result in role conflict. Individual confronted with role conflict will often experience psychological stress leading to emotional problems. More often than not, it will be latent stress, which will not be very overtly visible. Other issues connected with intra personal conflict are:-

- (a) When there is a threat to a person's values.
- (b) Feeling of unfair treatment, which could be from anybody.
- (c) Multiple and contradictory social commitments.
- (d) Related to the Theory of Cognitive Dissonance.

Any individual confronted with role conflict will experience psychological stress leading to emotional problems. Role conflict can have a markedly adverse impact on satisfaction and environmental or physical health. Sepoy Vikrant Singh was under tremendous stress due to umpteen numbers of mixed thoughts, which were created in his mind by his own internal conflicts that he was battling alone throughout. Sepoy Vikrant Singh's conflict started with his own personality deterioration. He was in a total turmoil with his own self as regards his wife and his suspicion of her having illicit relations based on his perception. Hence his personality had over tones of his family life. He displayed the typical character of an early achiever with good performance on the course, and had reached a high satisfaction level pre-marriage, but due to latent stress he was undergoing on his family front along with organizational apathy, he rapidly degenerated on the professional front as well. But his personal emotional turmoil was so much bottled up inside him that he could not take it and committed suicide.

2. What are the sources of stress? How could Vikrant cope with such a stress?

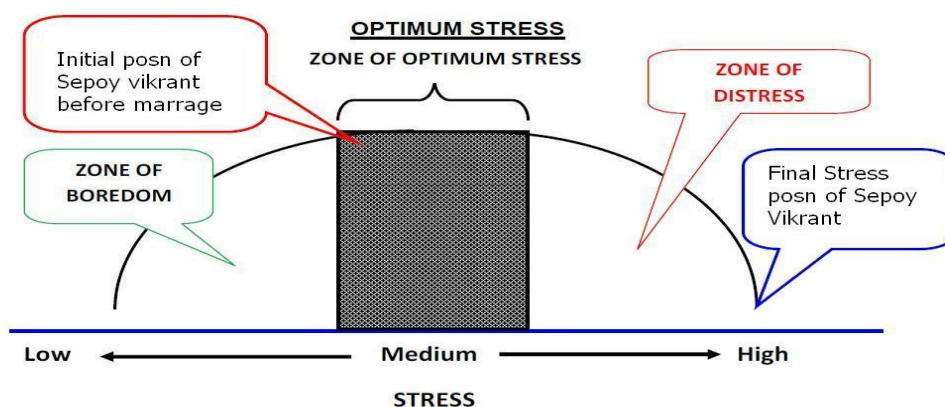
Stressor related to personality factors vary widely. Various dimensions of vulnerability form the characteristics, for enduring the personality. These are affected, by genetic, developmental, and social influences. Vulnerability also changes from day-to-day, mood and individual experiences in life. One's perception of the expectations held of him and one's perceived ability to control the situation are important factors in understanding how life events are interpreted, and what reaction and coping mechanisms are evoked. In the case of Vikrant Singh, this was very evidently demonstrative in his changed behavior and attitude over a period of only one year that of his marriage. While he wanted to marry a modern woman, he could not cope with the openness and frank behavior of his wife with the opposite sex. These resulted in his subdued performance and rapid drifting towards aloofness, quiet behavior and preference for solitude. His only emotional out let was penning down his mental conflict and reasoning with self about the correctness of his wife's attitude.

Frustration is a result of the thwarting of a motive, either by some obstacles which block our progress towards a desired goal or it can arise by delays lack of resources, and failure or denial of individual needs. Frustration can also occur due to personality traits which prevent an individual from bringing issues troubling him out in the open. Sepoy Vikrant Singh continued to suffer frustration, as he could not openly question his wife despite being doubtful, (which he ultimately did just before he committed suicide). He could not speak about his suspicions to his family members as he had defied their sentiments and married against their wishes. Being a Rajput, he could not discuss this sensitive issue with his friends, peers and superiors in the unit, fearing that he would become a laughing tock in the unit.

3. Explain the optimum stress level in the case of Sepoy Vikrant Singh?

When the environment exerts as train and acts, like a stress or as, in case of Sepoy Vikrant Singh, it poses a challenge, for adjustment. These challenges can result in both positive and negative forms of stress, being experienced as the individual, tries to cope with these. To understand what would constitute an optimum level of positive form of stress, it would be, best to refer to **Yerkes-Dodson Model**. (Yerkes R.M, Dodson, J.D. 1908) at Figure 2.

Figure 2 : Optimum Stress :Yerkes-Dodson Model.



All human reactions are in response to stress of one type or the other. Stress is necessary for everyone to function satisfactorily. Normally we, perform best at optimum stress level as shown above. Stress at a very low level results in zone of boredom leading to the decay of our psychological system while a high stress level results in zone of distress leading to accumulation of fatigue that later manifests itself in the form of physiological or psychological problems. In the initial stages of his service till he got married, Sepoy Vikrant Singh displayed high degree of enthusiasm and interest in whatever job was assigned to him and took active part in various activities of the unit. It was quite evident that he was in the 'Zone of optimal stress' in the initial stages. However when he was going through the personal stresses post his marriage saw the sudden down fall to a higher stress level. The manifestation of the said stress was so latent due to the impact of the cognitive dissonance that it was not recognized by the peer group and the relevant personnel present during the stage.

4. What does research say about psychological breakpoint of an individual?

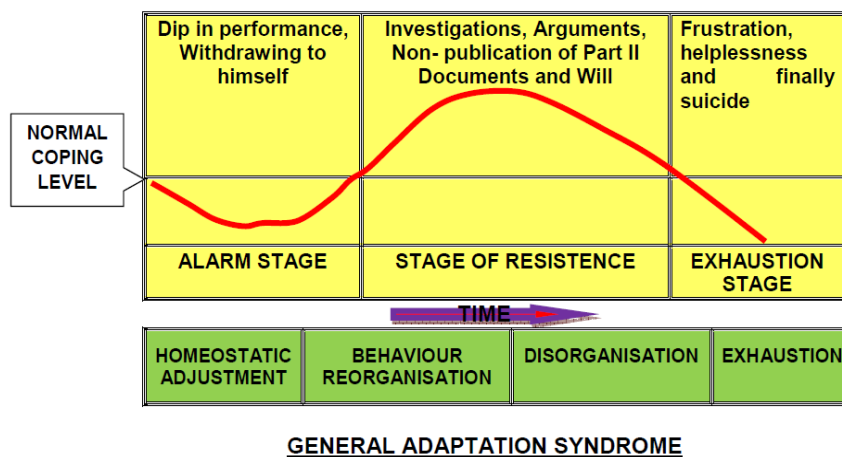
A psychological break point cannot be predicted. However, of course, factors like: our environment, biologically factors, lack of sleep, fever, brain damage, war, parenthood and general stresses, can all be causes for a psychotic break. Even after knowing the causes, we still cannot predict it because each individual has his unique way of handling break points. No doubt there are warning signs of a psychotic break, but they may be varied and they are not always as simple as they seem. Symptoms can include: delusions, violent behavior (especially spastic outbursts), depression and sometimes no harmful symptoms. In case of Sepoy Vikrant, his wife’s infidelity was the break point. A Rajput, not able to win his wife’s loyalty was the optimum stress for him and he could not handle it.

5. What is the relevance of Self Esteem and Social needs with Stress?

The needs are arranged in a hierarchy of importance. In case of Sepoy Vikrant Singh, he was initially striving to be a satisfied man when he got married and was happy with his ‘modern’ wife. However his conflict with own self began at the stage when he suspected his wife’s illicit relationship with her brother-in-law, and the issue got further cemented by ‘Halo Effect’. He could never transit to higher need level and remained engrossed in his lower order needs only. His ego was always hurting him and staying aloof, not publishing his marriage documents were adopted by him as a defence mechanism to safe guard the ego.

There are three stages in Coping Behavior as per General Adaptation Syndrome, as shown in Figure 3 namely Alarm Stage, Resistance stage & Exhaustion Stage (Selye, H.1956). Coping behavior is pertinent to understand the complexities of Sepoy Vikrant Singh’s behavior and actions.

Figure 3 General Adaptation Syndrome



Vikrant Singh, due to high degree of latent stress, initially became agitated and started investigating his wife’s antecedents and present movements. Then he withdrew into his shell and there was a dip in his performance. This is typical of the Alarm stage. In the Resistance Stage, he tried to fight with his wife, tried to establish proof, did not complete marriage documentation and change his ‘Will’. Very rapidly due to no support and empathy from anyone, he moved from the resistance stage to the stage of exhaustion. Due to the feeling of utter helplessness, frustration, and finally exhaustion, he ended his life by shooting himself.

6. What were the changes in the behavior of Sep Vikrant Singh?

There is a need to monitor the existing stress level and carry out review periodically. In the case of Sepoy Vikrant Singh, it can be inferred that he had experienced high emotional stress, which affected his psyche and had distorted his perceptions and responses. But due to the sensitive nature of his problem, he could never share his grief with anyone. This stressful situation made him resort to behavior akin to withdrawal. Had the monitoring been done earlier, the management would have been that much better. Peer groups can play an important role in stress identification as also sub unit Commander/immediate superiors.

7. What is the role of Organization’s Climate & Social support System in containing stress levels?

It allows the person to cope successfully with the inevitable stress and continue performing efficiently. When the well- established emotional climate of any organization reflects genuine concern for the legitimate needs of its people and shows regard for its men, the individual values blend successfully with the purpose of the organization despite an individual having his own problems. The same is more relevant for any military

establishments. In the instant case, when Sepoy Vikrant Singh started showing some signs of changed behavior and drop in performance, it should have sent out the desired signals for corrective efforts. As confirmed by investigations later, the interview system as laid down in standing orders were not being followed by the unit where in the officers could discuss sensitive issues with their men. Also, despite the subunit being aware of the changes in his behavioral pattern still allowed him to undertake duties at isolated posts where he used to brood more. Normally, any armed and isolated duty is carried out by a homogenous group such as a section, platoon from the same Company/ subunit where in every one knows each other well. In this case, Guard duty was being performed by personnel from different subunits. Usually a supportive social relationship with seniors, colleagues and subordinates at work will directly reduce levels of perceived stress. Supportive and helpful peer group are less likely to create intrapersonal pressures. Such support makes people feel more positively about themselves and their work and alters our perceptions of potentiality threatening events.

Though psychological investigation may be the forte of experts, the routine man management skills acquired in the forces coupled with experience of handling variety of cases, provides enough basic knowledge to handle many cases. The Inquiry Committee through sequential analysis of the case and its correlation with the personal diary of the individual could identify the root cause of the problem which was eluding everyone. A focused approach to get involved and solve the problem could have led to the crux of the problem and may be Sepoy Vikrant Singh's life could have been saved.

IV. Conclusion

The case study has, attempted to examine the theoretical aspects of 'breaking point' led by the stress of intra personal conflict and its manifestation through analysis of real life incident of an individual. The aspects of severe stress, level which had affected behavior of the soldier and which ultimately led to his withdrawal and untimely death have been analyzed in detail. Managing the most important resource of Armed forces i.e. the man himself, assumes great importance in the overall effectiveness of the organization. As a teaching model, it tends to highlight various facets of organizational climate and human personality development as related to onset of stress, and how to cope with stress and the remedial measures. The case study, in the, ultimate analysis has been aimed to exercise the minds of the participants on the various methods in enduring the break point, facing stress in one's life, to increase the optimal stress level and also to effectively manage stress arising out of intra personal conflict in case of an individual which had gone unnoticed and led to the tragic end of a promising young person. In such a situation a well administered, happy, motivated and responsive combat outfit can act as a much needed support system to mitigate stress levels. Well defined instructions and guide lines exist on the subject and problem is being tackled head on by the Armed Forces.

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TABLE1: IMPORTANT TIMELINES

	Date	Event
1.	10 May 2003	Sepoy Vikrant Singh joins XX Regt from Centre.
2.	03 Jan 2007	Sepoy Vikrant Singh comes first in Inter-unit Marathon race Competition.
3.	14 Mar 2008	Meets Ms Veena in Jodhpur during leave and gets enamored with her due to her 'forwardness' being from an urban family.
4.	12 Jul 2009	Gets married to Ms Veena despite counsel from his family side, they being from a rural background.
5.	03 Oct 2009-	Proceeds on leave. Gets suspicious of his wife's closeness to her brother- in law. Starts inquiring about her college day and back ground. Does not complete marriage documentation or change his 'Will' on return.
6.	04 Jan 2010	Comes 10 th in the Inter unit Marathon race Competition. Also does not perform so well in the Promotion Cadre despite being studious.
7.	18 Feb 2010	Proceeds on leave again. Returns back. Becomes slightly reclusive but still does not express any stress. Gets 'Will' nomination changed.
8.	09 Mar 2010	Senior Officer's visit to Station. Everyone in the unit is very busy. Sepoy Vikrant Singh detailed for Guard Duty.
9.	11 Mar 2010	Special Barakhana in the unit. Sepoy Vikrant Singh commits suicide.