

# Stress and its coping Mechanism

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## Introduction

Modern life is full of stress. As organizations become more complex, the potential for and the amount of stress increases. Urbanisation, industrialization, and the increase in scales of operations are causing increasing stresses. These are the inevitable consequences of socio-economic complexity. People feel stressed as they can no longer have complete control over what happens in their life. The telephone goes out of order, the power is shut off, the water supply is disrupted, an expected promotion is denied, a son or a daughter does not do well in school, prices of essential commodities increase disproportionately to the income, and so on and so forth-and we feel frustrated and then stressed out.

There is no escape from stress in modern life. Hence we need to find ways of using stress in a productive way, reducing dysfunctional stress, and dealing effectively with it.

Several terms have been used synonymously with stress. Four terms are in related literature: stress, strain, conflict and pressure. The word 'strain' has been used to denote the effect of stress on the individual. 'Pressure' has been used in the same sense. The word 'conflict' usually denotes incompatibility between two variables: goals, means, ideas, etc. the term 'stress' has been used to denote a stimulus (or cause) like an out-of-order telephone; the response (physiological, behavioural, or cognitive changes) to such a cause, for example, heightened blood pressure, quickened breathing, stamping of the foot, perceiving the telephone department as incompetent, etc.; or the resultant state of the organism, for example, indifference, effort to get the telephone repaired, etc.

In order to avoid confusion, we shall use the term 'stressor' for the stimuli that produce stress; the term 'stress' for the affective (emotional) part of the experience of incongruence; the term 'symptoms' for physiological, behavioural, and conceptual responses or changes; and the term 'coping' for behaviour to deal with the emotional component of the experience of incongruence (i.e., stress).

Stress is a general term applied to various psychological (mental) and physiologic (bodily) pressures experience or felt by people throughout their lives.

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Stress is "a state of psychological and physiological imbalance resulting from the disparity between situational demand and the individual's ability and motivation to meet those needs."

**Dr. Hans Selye**, one of the leading authorities on the concept of stress, described stress as "the rate of all wear and tear caused by life."

**Three types of Stress :** In recent studies on stress, three types of stress have been identified:

**I. Eustress :** Eustress that is positive in nature and contributes to the well being and fulfillment of the person leading to a wellness Life Style. Such a stress relates to wellness in two ways: promoting constructive and adaptive modes of behaviour on the one hand and enabling the person to live/follow a wellness Life Style by minimizing distress on the other. In this perspective, the point of managing stress effectively is not only to prevent harmful distress, emotional upset, headaches or heart attacks but also directed at achieving higher purposes ensuring wellness – well being and fulfillment at one's highest possible level as a whole and promoting the same for others.

**II. Distress :** Distress which is negative and dysfunctional and causes inter alia excessive worry, depression, irritability, dissatisfaction, nervousness and inability to concentrate to mention only a few. The negative aspect of stress may be observed through physiological, psychological and behavioural symptoms in a person. Hans Selye (1974) identified a universal pattern of physical stress known as the General Adaptation Syndrome (GAS) which helps us to understand how the body handles stress over time and how physical stress gives way to distress. This has been identified with three phases – Alarm Reaction phase followed by sustained resistance and stage of exhaustion.

**III. Neustress :** Neustress that is neutral in character and is handled by the person using his/her normal patterns of behaviour strategies to deal with the situation. Such stress is available in most of our day to day transactions and commonly encountered situations of life predictable or unpredictable, visible or invisible.

**Causes of Stress :** There are three sets of factors which act as potential sources or causes of stress. Whether they assume the form of an actual stress depends on individual differences such as personality traits of type A or type B, proactive or reactive personality, stress bearing capacity, change in life style, change in career, thinking style, pace of life, sociability, economic condition and sundry other factors. Learned helplessness as indicated in Seligman's research which is manifest in the feeling/experiencing helplessness when one perceives the causes of the lack of control is another facet of stress which may be sighted in most of our today's work situations. Psychological hardness is another

attribute belonging to the domain of individual differences in people faced with difficult situations and stresses. Those individuals who are able to cope successfully with extreme stressors are said to be having hardiness disposition. Some major causes of stress are indicated as follows:

**Career Concern :** If an employee feels that he is very much behind in the corporate ladder, then he may experience stress. If he seems that there are no opportunities for self-growth, he may experience stress. Hence, unfulfilled career expectations are the significant source of stress.

**Role Ambiguity :** It occurs when the person doesn't know what he is supposed to do, on the job. His tasks and responsibilities are not clear. The employee is not sure what he is expected to do. It creates confusion in the minds of the worker and results in stress.

**Role Conflict :** It takes place people have different expectations from the person performing a particular role. It can also if the job is not per expectation, or when a job demands a certain type of behaviour that is against the person's moral values.

**Occupational Demands :** Some jobs are more demanding than others. Jobs that involve risk and danger are more stressful. Research finding indicate, job that cause stress needs constant monitoring of equipments and devices, unpleasant physical conditions, making decisions, etc.

**Work Overload :** Excessive workload leads to stress as it puts a person under tremendous pressure. Work overload may take two different forms:

- a. Qualitative work overload implies performing a job that is complicated or beyond the employee's capacity.
- b. Quantitative work overload is a result of many activities performed in a prescribed time.

**Lack of Group Cohesiveness :** Every group is characterized by its cohesiveness, although they differ widely in its degree. Individuals experience stress when there is no unity among work group members. There are mistrust, jealousy, frequent quarrels, etc., in group and this lead to stress to employees.

**Interpersonal and Intergroup Conflict :** These conflict take due to differences in perceptions, attitudes, values and beliefs between two or more individuals and groups. Such conflicts can be a source of stress for group members.

**Organizational Changes :** When changes occur, people have to adapt to those changes, and this may cause stress. Stress is higher when changes are significant or unusual like transfer or adoption of new technology.

**Civic Amenities :** Poor civic amenities in the area in which one lives can be a cause of stress. Inadequate or lack of public facilities like improper water supply, excessive noise or air pollution, lack of proper transfer facility can be quite stressful.

**Technological Changes :** When there are any changes in technical fields, employees are under the constant fear of losing jobs or need to adjust to new technologies. It can be a source of stress.

#### Other causes

- Academic stress: to achieve higher and higher.
- Vocational stress: Looking for a vocation in the public and Private sector- Sometimes one has to compromise with whatever one gets in private sector (multinational). This results in lack of personal satisfaction, fulfillment and causes difficulties in vocational adjustment.
- Unstable personality development.
- Pressures to excel in academic as well as extra-curricular activities.
- Access to visual media like TV portraying programs that promote violence, aggression, competitiveness.
- High level of competition at every stage leading to reduction of support from peer group.

#### Consequences of Stress

There are two kinds of consequences:

**I. Positive consequences :** Experts have analyzed the consequences of stress in terms of positive effect (effect of Eustress) and negative effect (effect of distress) to the individuals as well as to the organizations. The positive effects to the individuals may be witnessed in more energy. More enthusiasm and more motivation manifest in their life styles whereas to the organizations the same may be perceived through the outcomes of high productivity, better results, high level of efficiency and effectiveness, innovativeness in ventures and concern for general well being.

**II. Negative consequences :** At the level of an individual these consequences may also be perceived in physiological and behavioural terms. In the physiological consequences one may observe in an individual a lessened ability to fight illness and infection, cardio vascular system problems such as BP and heart diseases and musculo-skeletal system problem-tensions, headache and back pain etc. in the behavioural domain these may be accompanied by anger, anxiety and depression, apathy, nervousness, irritability and boredom etc.

Likewise, the consequences of stress to an organization may be seen in the lower productivity, poor quality products, high absenteeism and turnover, poor customer services, avoidable conflicts, confrontations and accidents.

As pointed out earlier stress leads to deviation or departures from routine working but it is not always harmful. The stress bearing capacity differs from person to person and from organizations to organizations chiefly because of their inner strength, mindset and outlook. A rigid and egoistical person is prone to have more chances of stress.

**Coping Strategy :** Following coping strategies may be used to reduce stress at work and also in the life:

**Feel a sense of responsibility :** Now a days most of the teachers try to find influential people in the school, college, university, administration, politics and society so that they can derive various types of help during crisis. They even try to support them at the cost of their values system. Teachers need to own their responsibility to work ethically and make efforts to maintain their emotional health and improve their teaching skills.

**Identify negative attitudes that increase stress while working :** Teachers, like other human being, have favourable or unfavourable attitudes towards various educational programmes, teaching strategies and styles, books, evaluation systems, policy decisions, persons, leaders, student and principal's behaviours, skills, technologies, social actions, etc. if these attitudes are not positive, they may feel stress. So, teachers need to identify their negative attitudes and make efforts to correct them. This can reduce the intensity as well as occurrence of stress.

**Learn better communication skills :** Many time our low level of skills in communicating to students, colleagues and principal or activity in-charge becomes a source of strained interpersonal relations which even reduce our teaching efficiency and competence to perform other related jobs. So, personality building workshops and efforts to develop communication and language skills can ease and improve our relationships with others.

**Be alert to recognize warning signs of excessive stress at work :** When we are too busy with our work and someone interrupts, we lose confidence and may become irritable or withdrawn. This can make us less effective. We may even perceive our work as less rewarding. We should not ignore the waning signs of work stress and not allow them to become chronic or severe physical and emotional health problems for ourselves. These signs are anxiety, irritability, drowsiness, sleep, exhaustion, fatigue, dislike to meet or talk to other people, mistake in work performance or spellings while writing, feeling

of depression or being tense, headache, abdominal pain, muscular pain in arms or neck etc., frequent desire to take tea or eat more, decrease of interest in work.

**Do some exercise when slightly tired :** Regular exercise is a powerful stress reliever. Aerobic exercise activity that raises our heart rate and makes us sweat – is an effective way to change our mood, increase energy, sharpen focus, and relax both the mind and body. For maximum stress relief, at least 30 minutes of exercise on most days is helpful. We may break up the activity into shorter segments and take rest between the segments. Even walking for some time or putting palms over the eyes for five minutes after reading or writing for fifteen minutes can decrease physical as well as mental stress. Meditation can also be helpful.

**Build a resource group and get support in need :** One should not expect oneself to be the master of everything. It is quite natural that he may be deficient in one or more skills. He may try to find teachers or friends who have better skills to perform some job where he is deficient. He should develop close relationships with them. Social and emotional support one derives from friends or family members can reduce stress among teachers. When these people give a good and empathetic listening to the feeling of burn-out or anxiety, stress gets reduced. Simple sharing of our feelings face to face with others can help us relieve some of the stress. Teachers need to remember that accepting support is not a sign of weakness. They need to trust their resource group and have confidence in the members of the group. Cooperative working strengthens inter-personal bonds and provides an insurance against stress and burn-out.

**Developing jurisprudential inquiry abilities :** Training in skills to use jurisprudential inquiry abilities like- ability to find policy issues in the social life, ability to identify the values and traditions which are in conflict, ability to state the basis and consequences of a policy decision, ability to explain the points where values are violated, ability to prove the desirable and undesirable consequences of decision, ability to explain value conflicts with the help of analogies, ability to fix value priorities, ability to suggest qualifiers for a position leading to refinement of stances and ability to identify and test factual assumptions underlying a position is essential. Teachers need to be trained in developing the skills to prepare case materials that may help in use of jurisprudential inquiry abilities among students and teachers. Use of these abilities can help in taking well informed decisions which will reduce occurrence of stress.

**Prioritizing and organizing one's tasks :** Teachers have to perform many complex or new tasks. They may try to teach innovatively or design new teaching learning materials. Haphazard and unsystematic

functioning can be a cause of stress. They need to have full control over the teaching learning situations. They can perform task analysis and thereafter try to prioritize various tasks and organize them. This will instill confidence in their ability to accomplish their tasks meaningfully and efficiently. Time schedules may be prepared by teachers who may then be encouraged to stick to it. They can try to find a balance between work and family life, social activities and solitary pursuits and daily responsibilities. They should not over-commit themselves to work. Trying to do too much work in less time can be stressful. They can avoid scheduling things back-to-back or trying to work too much in one day. Distinguishing between the “should” and the “musts” can be of an advantage as tasks that are not really necessary can be dropped or postponed for some time. It is good to plan regular breaks. Short breaks can be used to walk or sit back and relax oneself. Trying to get away from work, move in the campus or corridors can help us recharge ourselves and become more productive. We can perform the high-priority tasks first. We can do the unpleasant tasks early. As a result the rest of our day can be more pleasant. When we ask others to contribute to a task, we should be willing to compromise to revise a deadline, or to allow a change their behavior at work.

**Develop the capacity to meet challenges :** Teachers should not be afraid of the stress producing situations. They need to expect, accept and meet them with courage and firm determination. They should have the willingness to resolve various conflicts positively. When handling emotionally-charge situations, they need to stay focused in the present by disregarding old hurts and resentments.

**Cultivate a friendly social climate :** Providing opportunities for social interaction among colleagues, establishing a zero-tolerance policy for harassment by principal and management of the institution, explicit rules and regulations to manage the functioning of the educational institution and opportunities for speedy grievance redressed for students, teachers and other employees, taking administrative decisions in accordance with organizational values can provide a social climate in which stress may not develop maximally.

**Perspective taking :** Teachers and students have their personal or somewhat collective opinions about their policy decisions and other behaviours. They seldom think about their impact on the stakeholders. This leads to conflicts and stress. If principals or Heads of the Departments consider the effect of their decisions on teachers and other employees, teachers give a thought to the impact of their behaviours on students and students assume themselves to be teachers to think about the influence of their behavior on the thinking, feelings and performance of teachers, incidence of interpersonal conflicts may

be reduced. So, dialogue with oneself and playing the role of stake holders in simulation can help in preparing oneself to face and meet the challenging situations that follow a policy change.

**Some remarkable habits can help to relieve stress:**

1. Regular meditation,
2. Physical exercise,
3. Balanced diet,
4. Focused thinking,
5. Control of anger,
6. Managing Depression,
7. Maintaining calmness in stressful situations,
8. Having a positive attitude towards life,
9. Harmony towards self and others, et
10. Time management may help to control stress
11. Deep breathing
12. Relaxation techniques
13. Listening to certain types of relaxing music e.g. classical music

**Conclusion :** If you wish to keep all your dimensions of health and life in a state of well-being, always think positive. To be vigilantly relaxed, learn and practice progressive muscle relaxation twice daily as suggested by a teacher late Prof. Joseph Wolpe, The father of Behaviour Therapy and transform your lives at present as well as pave the way for healthy ageing.

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