

Causes of Stress and Stress Management

Dr. M.P Baligar*

Introduction

Stress is a general term applied to various psychological (mental) and physiological (bodily) pressures experienced or felt by people throughout their lives. Stress is defined as “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**, described stress as “the rate of all wear and tear caused by life.”

Stress can be positive or negative:

1. Stress is good when the situation offers an opportunity to a person to gain something. It acts as a motivator for peak performance.
2. Stress is negative when a person faces social, physical, organizational and emotional problems.

Causes of Stress

A) Among the people in job

1. **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.
2. **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.
3. **Rotating Work Shifts:** Stress may occur in those individuals who work on different work shifts. Employees may be expected to work on day shift for some days and then on the night shift. That may create problems in adjusting to the shift timings, and it can affect not only personal life but also family life of the employee.

*Assistant professor in Sociology, A W University, Vijayapura

4. **Role Conflict:** It takes place when people have different expectations from the person performing a particular role. It can also occur if the job is not as per expectation, or when a job demands a certain type of behavior that is against the person's moral values.
5. **Occupational Demands:** Some jobs are more demanding than others. Jobs that involve risk and danger are more stressful. Research findings indicate, job that cause stress needs constant monitoring of equipments and devices, unpleasant physical conditions, making decisions, etc.
6. **Lack of Participation in Decision-making:** Many experienced employees feel that management should consult them on matters affecting their jobs. In reality, the superiors hardly ask the concerned employees before taking a decision. That develops a feeling of being neglected, which may lead to stress.
7. **Work Overload:** Excessive workload leads to stress as it puts a person under tremendous pressure. Work overload may take two different forms:
 1. *Qualitative work overload* implies performing a job that is complicated or beyond the employee's capacity.
 2. *Quantitative work overload* is a result of many activities performed in a prescribed time.
8. **Work Underload:** In this, case, too little work or very easy work is expected on the part of the employee. Doing less work or jobs of routine and simple nature would lead to monotony and boredom, which can lead to stress.
9. **Poor Working Conditions:** Employees may be subject to poor working conditions. It would include bad lighting and ventilation, unhygienic sanitation facilities, excessive noise, and dust, presence of toxic gases and fumes, inadequate safety measures, etc. All these unpleasant conditions create physiological and psychological imbalance in humans thereby causing stress.
10. **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 groups and this lead to stress to employees.
11. **Interpersonal and Intergroup Conflict:** These conflicts take place 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.

12. 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.

13. Lack of Social Support: When individuals believe that they have the friendship and support of others at work, their ability to cope with the effects of stress increases. If this kind of social support is not available, then an employee experiences more stress.

14. 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.

15. Career Changes: When a person suddenly switches to another job, he is under stress to shoulder new responsibilities adequately. Under-promotion, over-promotion, demotion and transfers can also cause stress.

B) Causes of stress outside work or organization:

The main causes of stress outside work or organization:

- 1. 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 transport facility can be quite stressful.
- 2. Life Changes:** Life changes can bring stress to a person. Life changes can be slow or sudden. Gradual life changes include getting older, and abrupt life changes include death or accident of a loved one. Sudden life changes are highly stressful and very difficult to cope.
- 3. Frustration:** Frustration is another cause of stress. It arises when goal-directed behavior gets blocked.
- 4. Racial, Caste, and Religious Conflicts:** Employees living in areas, which are often prone to conflicts among people based on differences seen in their race, caste and religion do suffer more from stress. In the case of a religion, the minorities and lower-caste people (especially in India) are subject to more stress.
- 5. Personality:** We can classify people as 'Type A' and 'Type B'.

The 'Type A' people:

1. They feel guilty while relaxing.
2. They get irritated by minor mistakes of self and others.
3. They feel impatient and dislike waiting.
4. They also multitask and prefer to do several things at one time.

The 'Type B' people are exactly opposite and hence are less affected by stress due to the above factors.

Stress Management

A) Unhealthy ways for coping with stress

These coping strategies may temporarily reduce stress, but they cause more damage in the long run:

- Smoking
- Drinking too much
- Overeating or Under eating
- Using pills to relax
- Sleeping too much
- Withdrawing from friends, family, and activities
- Taking out the stress on others
- Zoning out for hours in front of the TV or computer

B) Healthy ways of coping with stress

- **Exercise regularly.** Targeted exercise goes a long way toward freeing the body of stress hormones and increasing the endorphin levels - responsible for feelings of happiness. Physical activity plays a key role in reducing and preventing the effects of stress. So, it is good to carve out some time from the busy schedule to exercise.

- **Avoid unnecessary stress:**

There are number of stressors that can be eliminated to avoid unnecessary stress. These are:

- **Learn how to say “no”** – Know your limits and stick to them. Whether in the personal or professional life, taking on more than you can handle is a sure fire recipe for stress.
- **Avoid people who stress you out** – If someone consistently causes stress in your life and you can't turn the relationship around, limit the amount of time you spend with that person or end the relationship entirely.
- **Take control of your environment** – If the evening news makes you anxious, turn the TV off. If going to the market is an unpleasant chore, do your grocery shopping online.
- **Avoid hot-button topics** – If you get upset over religion or politics, cross them off your conversation list. If you repeatedly argue about the same subject with the same people, stop bringing it up or excuse yourself when it's the topic of discussion.
- **Pare down your to-do list** – Analyze your schedule, responsibilities, and daily tasks. If you've got too much on your plate, distinguish between the “shoulds” and the

“musts.” Drop tasks that aren’t truly necessary to the bottom of the list or eliminate them entirely.

➤ **Accept the things you cannot change**

Some sources of stress are unavoidable. Sometimes it is not possible to prevent or change stressors such as the death of a loved one, a serious illness, or a national recession. In such cases, the best way to cope with stress is to accept things as they are. For this:

- **Don’t try to control the uncontrollable.** Many things in life are beyond our control—particularly the behavior of other people. Rather than stressing out over them, focus on the things you can control such as the way you choose to react to problems.
- **Share your feelings.** Talk to a trusted friend face to face or make an appointment with a therapist. The simple act of expressing what you’re going through can be very cathartic, even if there’s nothing you can do to alter the stressful situation. Opening up is not a sign of weakness and it won’t make you a burden to others. In fact, most friends will be flattered that you trust them enough to confide in them, and it will only strengthen your bond.
- **Learn to forgive.** Accept the fact that we live in an imperfect world and that people make mistakes. Let go of anger and resentments. Free yourself from negative energy by forgiving and moving on.

➤ **Make time for fun and relaxation**

If you regularly make time for fun and relaxation, you’ll be in a better place to handle life’s stressors and for this:

- **Set aside relaxation time.** Include rest and relaxation in daily schedule. Don’t allow other obligations to encroach. This is the time to take a break from all responsibilities and recharge your batteries.
- **Connect with others.** Spend time with positive people who enhance your life. A strong support system will buffer you from the negative effects of stress.
- **Do something you enjoy every day.** Make time for leisure activities that bring you joy, whether it be stargazing, playing the piano, or working on your bike.
- **Keep your sense of humor.** This includes the ability to laugh at yourself. The act of laughing helps your body fight stress in a number of ways.

➤ **Adopt a healthy lifestyle**

In addition to regular exercise, there are other healthy lifestyle choices that can increase resistance to stress.

- **Eat a healthy diet:** Well-nourished bodies are better prepared to cope with stress, so be mindful of what you eat. Start your day right with breakfast, and keep your energy up and your mind clear with balanced, nutritious meals throughout the day.
- **Reduce caffeine and sugar:** The temporary "highs" caffeine and sugar provide often end in with a crash in mood and energy. By reducing the amount of coffee, soft drinks, chocolate, and sugar snacks in your diet, you'll feel more relaxed and you'll sleep better.
- **Avoid alcohol, cigarettes, and drugs:** Self-medicating with alcohol or drugs may provide an easy escape from stress, but the relief is only temporary. Don't avoid or mask the issue at hand; deal with problems head on and with a clear mind.
- **Get enough sleep:** Adequate sleep fuels your mind, as well as your body. Feeling tired will increase your stress because it may cause you to think irrationally.

Conclusion

Life is full of stress. Sometimes it comes and goes and sometimes it lingers. Sometimes our stressors are small, and sometimes they are big. Stress may come from within or come from an outside source. Stress is connected with life changes, personal and/or work-related; and too many changes at one time, either positive or negative, can overload an individual's capacity to adapt successfully and result in illness of one sort or another. Understanding stress is an important part of stress management. One should always remember the 4A's viz. Avoid the stressor, Alter the stressor, Adapt to the stressor or Accept the stressor to live a stress free life.

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