



STRESS



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ABSTRACT:

Every person experience stress. Stress is the term which has become part of everybody's life. It occur automatically in every human being but its level may be mild, moderate or high. During stress several physical and emotional changes takes place. It affect on cognitive functioning also. It can produce chronic physiological and psychological disorders. The present paper throws light on nature of stress, reactions to stress, effects of stress, stress management and techniques that are useful for stress reduction.

KEY WORDS: Nature of stress, reactions to stress, fight or flight response, General Adaptation Syndrome, cognitive functioning, stress management, relaxation training, biofeed back, psychological counseling, social support, buffering hypothesis.

INTRODUCTION:

• OBJECTIVES :-

I) To make aware the readers about nature of stress.



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ii) To enhance knowledge about physiology of stress and reactions to stress.

iii) To give information about stress management and stress reduction techniques.

• NATURE AND DEFINITION OF STRESS :-

According to W. B. Cannon (1936), Stress consists of environmental demands that lead to physical responses.

According to Lazarus (1999), Stress can be thought of as any event that strains or exceeds an individual's ability to cope.

According to Hans Selye, Stress is the body's reaction to anything that threatens to damage the organism.

By these definition we can understand that stress has two components – physical and psychological, physical components involves direct material or bodily changes. Psychological changes involves how individuals perceive circumstances in their lives.



• **PHYSIOLOGICAL REACTIONS TO STRESS :-**

Stress elicits strong emotional responses. These responses create physiological changes. Even in moderate stress you may notice that your heart has started beating faster, you have begun to breathe, harder, and you are preparing than usual.

There are two bodily reactions to stress – (1) The “fight or flight” response and (2) General Adaptation Syndrome.

(1) The “fight or flight” response :-

The fight or flight response is a physiological reaction to threat that mobilizes an organism for attacking (fight) or fleeing (flight) an enemy. First described by Walter Cannon (1932), the fight – or – flight response occurs in the body’s autonomic nervous system. The autonomic nervous system (ANS) is made up of the nerves that connect to the heart, blood vessels, smooth muscles and glands. The autonomic nervous system is somewhat autonomous. That is, it controls involuntary visceral functions that people don’t normally think about such as heart rate, digestion and perspiration.

There are two parts of autonomic nervous system – sympathetic and parasympathetic.

The parasympathetic division of the ANS generally conserve bodily resources. For instance, it slows heart rate and promote digestion to help the body save and store energy. The fight – or – flight response is mediated by the sympathetic division of the autonomic nervous system, which mobilizes bodily resources.

(2) General Adaptation Syndrome :-

GAS Model :-

The concept of Stress was studied deeply by Hans Selye (1936, 1956, 1982). Selye proposed theory of stress reactions called the general adaptation syndrome. The general adaptation syndrome is a model of the body’s stress response, consisting of three stages : alarm, resistance and exhaustion.

1) Alarm Stage :-

The first stage of the GAS is like the fight – or – flight response to an emergency – its function is to mobilize – the body’s responses. This fast acting arousal results from the sympathetic nervous system, which activates many organs through direct nerve connections, including the adrenal glands, which when stimulated release adrenaline and nor adrenaline into the blood stream, producing further activation. Somewhat less quickly, the hypothalamus – pituitary – adrenal axis (HPA) of the stress response is activated, and this component of the stress response was Selye’s novel and main emphasis. Briefly, the hypothalamus triggers the pituitary gland to secrete ACTH, which causes the adrenal gland to release cortisol into blood stream, further enhancing the body’s mobilization.

2) Exhaustion Stage :-

Prolonged physiological arousal produced by severe long term or repeated stress is costly. It can weaken the immune system and deplete the body’s energy reserves until resistance is very limited.

In this stage again adrenal glands become enlarged. The kidneys get damaged serious physical changes may also occur in the brain. The result is illness. At this point stage of exhaustion begins. If the stress continues, disease and damage to internal organs are likely and death may occur.

• **STRESS AND PHYSICAL PROBLEMS :-**

Stress can affect behavior and it can lead to illness. People who experience high levels of stress

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tend to become ill or injured. Stress produces many physiological changes in the body that can affect health, when stress is chronic and severe.

Cardiovascular reactivity refers to physiological changes that occur in the heart vessels, and blood pressure in response to stressors / Stress can produce psycho-physiological disorders refers to physical symptoms or illness that results from the interplay of psychosocial processes. For eg. Digestive system diseases, ulcer, asthma, migraine headache.

• PSYCHOLOGICAL ASPECTS OF STRESS :-

High levels of stress affect people's memory and affection.

The two way connection between cognition and stress is particularly important in the group of cognitive processes called executive functioning. Executive functions refer to a set of cognitive abilities involved in the regulation and direction of our ongoing behavior such as maintaining and shifting attention as needed, or inhibiting unhelpful or inappropriate responses or impulses, current or working memory capacity and selecting among alternative responses under consideration.

These are the cognitive processes that enable us to direct and guide our behavior intentionally.

Better executive cognitive functioning obviously can help one manage the demands of stressful situation but stressful experience can also temporarily disrupt these cognitive processes. That is difficulties with concentration, memory, problem solving and impulse control during stressful experiences may reflect the fact that stress has temporarily depleted or fatigued these cognitive resources. Depleted executive cognitive resources can lead to more difficulty dealing with stressful situations, creating a possible "Vicious Cycle" of stress and impaired cognition.

• STRESS MANAGEMENT :-

Stress can be managed by coping effectively with it. Coping refers to efforts to muster, reduce or tolerate the demands created by stress. People cope with stress in different ways. Individuals have their own styles of coping. In everyday terms when we say that someone "Coped with his problems" we imply that he handled his problems effectively.

Lazarus suggested two types of coping techniques. These are problem focused coping and emotional focused coping.

Problem focused coping strategy refers to facing one's problems and trying to solve them.

Emotional focused coping refers to responding to stress in an emotional manner, especially by using defense mechanisms. Defense mechanisms are largely unconscious reactions that protect a person from unpleasant such as anxiety and guilt.

In emotional focused coping a person might avoid something, denying that it is occurring, or rationalize what has happened to him.

Another way of emotion focused coping is emotional insulation. In this technique, person stops to experience any emotion at all. In this way he remains unaffected by positive and negative emotions.

• TECHNIQUES FOR STRESS REDUCTION :-

1) Meditation :-

Meditation refers to a family of mental exercises in which a conscious attempt is made to focus attention in a non analytic way. There are several techniques of meditation. In all of them, the mediator attempts to focus attention and avoid unwanted thoughts.

Meditation leads to lower levels of stress hormone cortisol in adults. This technique can reduce anxiety, improve blood pressure, increase creativity and raise self-esteem.

2) Relaxation Training :-

Ample evidence suggests that relaxation training is useful in reducing stress. Relaxation training involves teaching the stressed person how to relax more effectively, both physically and mentally.

Steps in relaxation training –

- i) Sit discreetly in an agreeable position.
- ii) Close your eyes.
- iii) Deeply unwind every one of your muscles.
- iv) Breathe through your nose. Inhale effectively and normally. Concentrate on inhale when it is taken inside and discharged outside.
- v) Continue for 10 to 20 min.
- vi) Don't stress over whether you are fruitful in accomplishing a profound level of unwinding. Keep up an inactive mentality and grant unwinding to happen its own particular pace. At the point when extreme musings happen, attempt to overlook them by not harping on them, and terturn to rehashing "one" with practice, the reaction ought to accompany little exertion. Hone the procedure once a twice day by day yet not inside of two hours after any supper.

3) Biofeedback :-

Biofeedback is a method of learning to achieve relaxation control stress responses, or modify the body's reactions through the use of monitoring equipment.

Biofeedback is used for a variety of psychological or physical conditions. Since the technique involves the use of measuring devices, it requires the help of a professional.

4) Psychological Counseling :-

Different Psychological Counseling Methods are available for dealing with stress. Effective crisis counseling may even enable a person to learn new ways of handling stress.

5) Social Support :-

Social Support appears to have a strong impact on the health of some individuals. Countless studies find that people involved in a network of close. Supportive relationships enjoy better health and more personal happiness than those who lack such a network.

The most impressive evidence for the importance of relationships comes from large – scale epidemiological studies involving thousands of people. These studies have found that people involved in a wide variety of social relationships get sick less often and live longer than people with few social involvements.

The irony of relationships is that they contribute most to our enduring happiness and joy, but also to our distress and misery. Our relationship have the potential both to enhance and to compromise our health. What explains the role of relationships in health ? One long standing explanation is built on the value of social support as a resource for coping with stress. The buffering hypothesis state that social support from others reduces (i.e. buffers) the potential effects of stress. By sharing our burden with others, our own burden becomes lighter, stress levels are reduced and stress – induced suppression of the immune system may decrease.

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