

INFLUENCE OF STRESS ON INDIVIDUAL HEALTH – A CONCEPTUAL ANALYSIS

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Abstract

Stress is considered as an integral part of modern life. It is the psychological or physiological reaction that occurs when an individual perceives an imbalance between the level of demand placed upon him and his capability for meeting that demand. The phenomenal rate of social and technical change also had its great impact on people's life style which is carried over into their jobs. Stress is what you feel when you have to handle more than you are used to. When you are stressed, your body responds as though you are in danger. It makes hormones that speed up your heart, make you breathe faster, and give you a burst of energy. This is called the fight-or-flight stress response. The hormones increase our heart rate, breathing, blood pressure, metabolism and muscle tension. Our pupils dilate and our perspiration rate increases. While these physical changes help us try to meet the challenges of the stressful situation, they can cause other physical or psychological symptoms if the stress is ongoing and the physical changes do not settle down.

Keywords: Stress, Psychological, Physiological, body responds, fight-or-flight and stress response

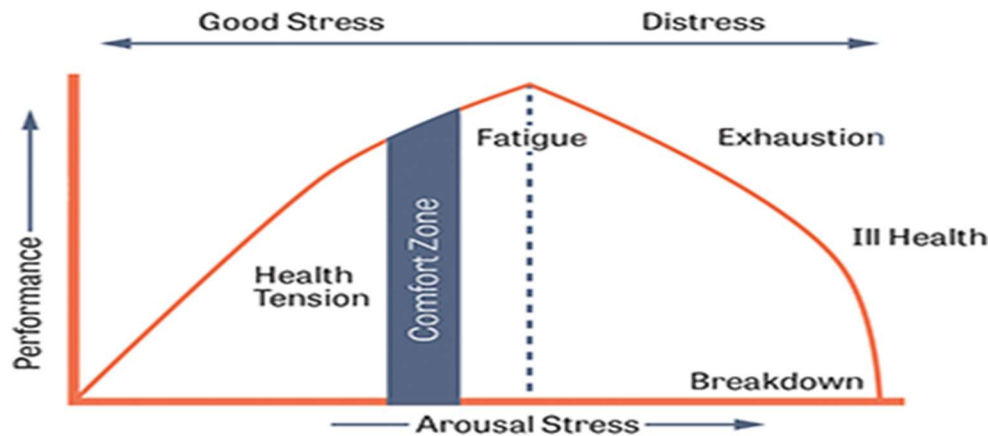
Introduction

Recent trends have made it increasingly difficult for employees to adequately balance the responsibility of their families, as employee are working longer hours and bringing more work home at night. This has resulted to more pressure being placed on the work-family relationship such that coordination of work, vocation schedules and child care options have become very unsuccessful (Dar et al. 2011). More and more voices warn about the possible risks that could emerge if the human resource management ignores the current signs of increase in levels of stress among employees (Robbins & Judge, 2007).

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What is stress?

Researchers define” Stress as a physical, mental, or emotional response to events that causes bodily or mental tension. Stress is often described as a feeling of being overloaded, wound-up tight, tense and worried. We all experience stress at times. It can sometimes help to motivate us to get a task finished, or perform well. But stress can also be harmful if we become over-stressed and it interferes with our ability to get on with our normal life for too long.



THE HUMAN FUNCTION CURVE

Hence Selye developed a model called the General Adaptive Syndrome Model to explain the stress phenomenon and the stress level. This model has four stages. The first stage is the alarm reaction stage, which involves the body's response to or familiarizing itself with the new situation or stressor. The second stage is the resistance stage, which involves resisting and reacting to the situation, and the third stage is the exhaustion stage, which is the aftermath of resistance. If the resistance stage goes on for a long period, then the person becomes distressed. Fourth stage is termination if there is no relief from arousal, and then the stress on the physiological system can lead to death.

The signs of stress

When we face a stressful event, our bodies respond by activating the nervous system and releasing hormones such as adrenalin and cortisol. These hormones cause physical changes in the body which help us to react quickly and effectively to get through the stressful situation. This is sometimes called the 'fight or flight' response.

The hormones increase our heart rate, breathing, blood pressure, metabolism and muscle tension. Our pupils dilate and our perspiration rate increases. While these physical changes help us try to meet the challenges of the stressful situation, they can cause other physical or psychological symptoms if the stress is ongoing and the physical changes don't settle down.

These symptoms can include:

1. Headaches, other aches and pains
2. Sleep disturbance, insomnia
3. Upset stomach, indigestion, diarrhea
4. Anxiety
5. Anger, irritability

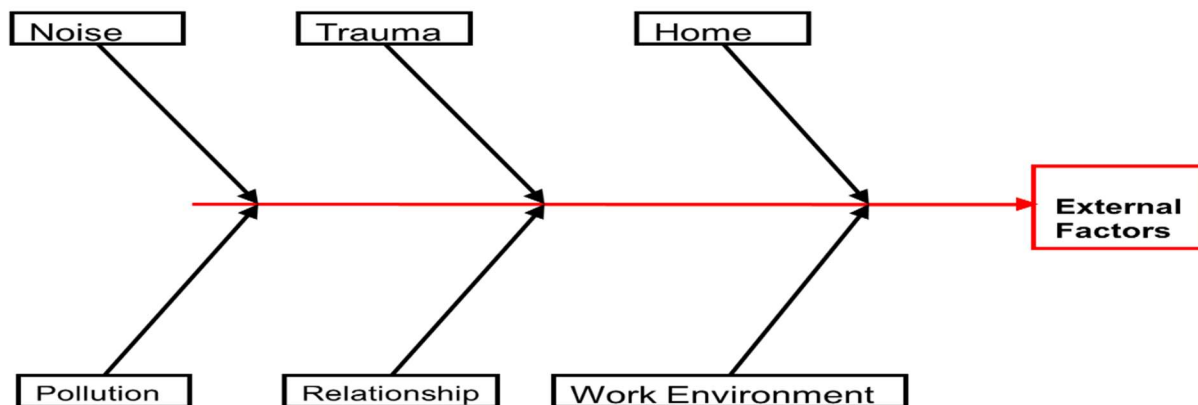
6. Depression
7. Fatigue
8. Feeling overwhelmed and out of control
9. Feeling moody, tearful
10. Difficulty concentrating
11. Low self-esteem, lack of confidence
12. High blood pressure
13. Weakened immune system
14. Heart disease

Here are two kinds of stress: external and internal stress

External stress comes from outside us:

1. Our physical environment
2. Our job
3. Noise – loud and constant low level noise
4. Pollution
5. Trauma
6. Injury
7. Foreign organisms (bacteria, viruses, fungi)
8. Toxins
9. Poor work conditions (not enough attention paid to ergonomics, too much noise, poor air circulation, lack of privacy, excess demands).
10. Relationships with others
11. Our home,
12. All the situations, challenges, difficulties, and expectations we confront with on a daily basis.

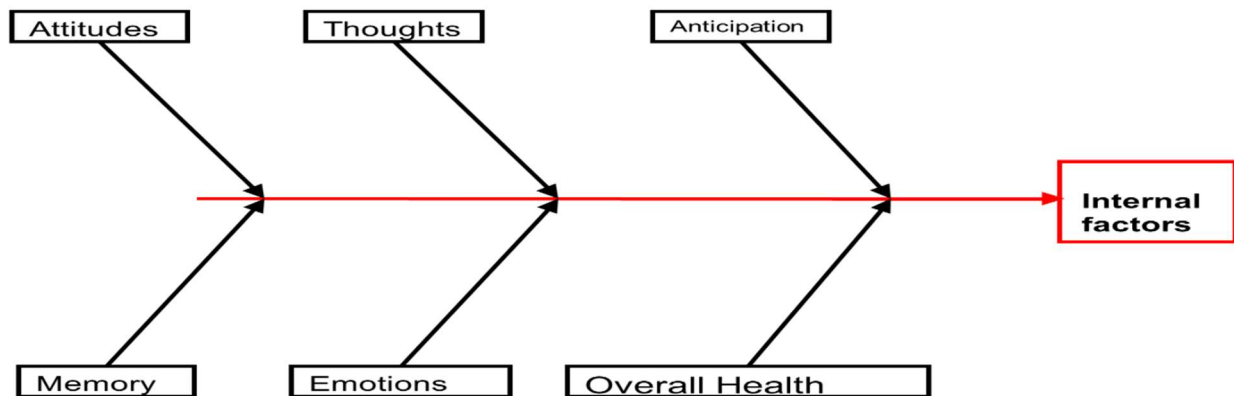
FISH BONE DIAGRAM – EXTERNAL STRESS FACTORS



Internal stress comes from inside of us and determines our body's ability to respond to, and deal with, the external stress-inducing factors or stressors:

1. Nutritional status
2. Attitudes
3. Thoughts
4. Feelings of anger, fear and worry
5. Anticipation
6. Imagination
7. Memory
8. Overall health and fitness levels
9. Presence of illness and infection
10. Emotional well-being
11. Amount of sleep and rest you get.
12. Managing stress can involve making changes in the external factors which confront you, or in internal factors which strengthen your ability to deal with what comes your way.

FISH BONE DIAGRAM – INTERNAL STRESS FACTORS



External stress is often associated with:

1. Workplace stress
2. Interpersonal conflicts
3. Relationship / marital stress
4. Balancing career and family
5. Being a parent

Stress Warning Signs and Symptoms	
Cognitive Symptoms	Emotional Symptoms
• Memory problems • Inability to concentrate • Poor judgment • Seeing only the negative • Anxious or racing thoughts	• Moodiness • Irritability or short temper • Agitation, inability to relax • Feeling overwhelmed • Sense of loneliness and isolation

Stress Warning Signs and Symptoms	
• Constant worrying	• Depression or general unhappiness
Physical Symptoms	Behavioral Symptoms
• Aches and pains • Diarrhoea or constipation • Nausea, dizziness • Chest pain, rapid heartbeat • Loss of sex drive • Frequent colds	• Eating more or less • Sleeping too much or too little • Isolating yourself from others • Procrastinating or neglecting responsibilities • Using alcohol, cigarettes, or drugs to relax • Nervous habits (e.g. nail biting, pacing)

Effects of Stress

The effects of stress can be emotional, psychological, and physical. Signs of stress are different in everyone, with some people expressing more physical signs, like fatigue or high blood pressure, and others expressing more emotion or psychological signs, like irritability or depression.

Ways to Keep Stress away

Stress has become a part of life for most people. An individual may not be able to get rid of stress, but he can look for ways to lower it.

You might try some of these ideas:

1. **Prioritize:** Learn better ways to manage the time. We may get more done with less stress if we make a schedule. Think about which things are most important, and do those first.
2. **Go for Better Options:** Look at how we have been dealing with stress. Be honest about what works and what does not. Think about other things that might work better.
3. **Importance to Health:** Take good care of oneself. Get plenty of rest. Eat well. Avoid smoking and alcohol.
4. **Distract your negative thoughts:** When we find ourselves starting to worry, try to stop the thoughts. Write down your worries and work on letting go of things you cannot change. Learn to say "no."
5. **Communicate and Converse:** Not being able to talk about our needs and concerns creates stress and can make negative feelings worse. Assertive communication can help us express how we feel in a thoughtful, tactful way.
6. **Search for Support:** People who have a strong network of family and friends manage stress better.

Ways to Manage Individual Stress

An individual will feel better if he/she can find ways to get stress out of their system. The best ways to relieve stress are different for each person. Try some of these ideas to see which ones work for you:

1. Physical Exercise: Regular exercise is one of the best ways to manage stress. Walking is a great way to get started.
2. Writing Habit: It can help to write about the things that are bothering you.
3. Be Expressive of your feelings: Talk, laugh, cry, and express anger when we need to with someone we trust.
4. Do something you enjoy: A hobby can help us relax. Volunteer work or work that helps others can be a great stress reliever.
5. Relax your body: This can include breathing exercises, muscle relaxation exercises, massage, aromatherapy, yoga, or relaxing exercises like tai chi and qi gong.
6. Live the moment: Try meditation, imagery exercises, or self-hypnosis. Listen to relaxing music. Try to look for the humour in life. Laughter really can be the best medicine.

Conclusion

Stress is not always bad. However, sometimes it causes several problems for an individual, which turns to affect their personal life as well as work life. Most of the organizations take care of their employees by providing stress management strategies to reduce the stress level. Nevertheless, periodical review is necessary to know the stress level of an individual. It helps to identify the effective strategies to be implemented and reduce the stress among each individual which helps in health living and performance in all lifestyles.

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