

# MEETING LIFE CHALLENGES

## STUDY-NOTES

### NATURE OF STRESS

- ❖ **Stress** is the pattern of responses which an organism makes to stimulus event that disturbs the equilibrium and exceeds a person's ability to cope.
- ❖ **Eustress** is defined as the level of stress that is good for us and helps us in achieving peak performance.
- ❖ **Distress** is manifestation of stress that causes our body wear and tear.
- ❖ **Stressors** are events that cause our body to give stress response. For example, noise and crowding.
- ❖ The reaction to external stress is called **strain**.
- **Lazarus concept of stress**
  - ❖ Lazarus has given two types of appraisals:
    - (i) **Primary Appraisal:** It refers to the perception of a new and changing environment as positive, negative or neutral. Negative events are appraised for the possible harm, threat and challenge.
    - (ii) **Secondary Appraisal:** It comes only if we perceive the situation to be negative. It is the assessment of our own coping ability and the resources that we have to meet up with the situation.
- **Different types of stress**
  - ❖ **Physical Stress:** Physical stress is the demands that change the state of body. For example, when we over-exert ourselves, lack of nutritional diet, etc.
  - ❖ **Environmental Stress:** It refers to the stress caused by environmental stressors such as pollution, crowding and other natural disasters.
  - ❖ **Psychological Stress:** These are stresses that we generate ourselves in our minds. These are personal and unique to the person experiencing them and are internal sources of stress. It has four components:
    - (i) **Frustration:** Frustration results from blocking of needs and motives by something or someone that hinders us from achieving a desired goal.
    - (ii) **Conflict:** When we have to choose between two or more incompatible needs or motives, it results in a conflict. For **example**, choosing between dance and psychology.
    - (iii) **Internal pressure:** It is a belief which is based upon expectation from inside us to ourselves. For example, when people think that I must be perfect.
    - (iv) **Social pressure:** It is born from people who make excessive demands on us. For example, parents, peer pressure, etc.
  - ❖ **Social Stress:** Stress arises due to external conditions. For example, death of spouse, trouble with neighbours, etc.
- **Sources of stress**
  - ❖ **Life Events:** Changes that are big, small, sudden or gradual in our life from the time we are born. For example, moving to a new house, breaking of a long-term relationship, etc.
  - ❖ **Hassels:** They are personal stresses we endure as individual due to happening of our daily life. For example, noisy surrounding, water shortage, etc.
  - ❖ **Traumatic Events:** They are extreme events such as fire, earthquake, robbery, etc. They persist as symptoms of anxiety, flashback, dreams and intrusive thought.

- **Effects of stress on psychological functioning and Health**

- ❖ **Emotional Effects:** These stresses include experiences of mood swings, erratic behaviour, decrease in confidence. It leads to more serious emotional problems such as feeling of anxiety, depression, increased physical tension, etc.
- ❖ **Physiological Effects:** Whenever our body is put under any kind of stress, there is release of certain hormones such as adrenaline and cortisol. These hormones bring about a change in the heart rate, blood pressure, metabolism and physical activities, which can result in slowing down of digestive system, expansion of air passage, increased heart rate, etc.
- ❖ **Cognitive Effects:** An individual loses the ability to make sound decisions. Faulty decisions made at home or career or workplace may lead to argument, failure, financial losses and even loss of job.
- ❖ **Behavioral Effects:** Eating less nutritious food, intake of stimulants like caffeine, excessive consumption of cigarettes, alcohol and tranquilizers. These tranquilizers may further lead to loss of concentration, poor coordination and dizziness.

- **Burnout**

- ❖ *Burnout* is a state of physical, emotional and psychological exhaustion.
- ❖ Physical exhaustion is seen in the signs of chronic fatigue, weakness and low energy.
- ❖ Mental exhaustion is seen in the form of irritability, anxiety, feeling of helplessness and hopelessness.

### **General Adaptation Syndrome**

- **General Adaptation Syndrome (GAS)** stands for general adaptability syndrome. It was proposed by Hans Selye.
- He studied the importance of stress on body by subjecting animals to a variety of stressors such as high temperature, X-rays, injections, etc.
- He found that there are three main bodily responses.

### **Stages of General Adaptation Syndrome**

- (i) **Alarms reaction:** Whenever a noxious stimulus or a stressor is present, it leads to adrenaline and pituitary cortex activation. It further releases hormones and the individual is ready to fight or flight. For example, when the date of examination is announced the students start studying.
- (ii) **Resistance:** If stress is prolonged, the resistance stage begins. The parasympathetic nervous system gets activated. It helps in the more cautious use of the bodily resources so that the individual can cope up with the threat. For example, the students try to make notes, complete homework and clear doubts.
- (iii) **Exhaustion:** After sometime, the bodily resources will get drained and our body will be vulnerable to diseases such as blood pressure and heart problems. For example, if the examination is long, and there is lack of proper sleep and nutritious diet.

### **Criticisms of GAS Model**

- Limited role of psychological factors has been explained.
- Researches have reported that psychological appraisal of an event is important for determination.
- People's response to stress depends upon their perception, personality and biological constitution.

- **Impact of stress on the immune system**

- ❖ Psychoneuroimmunology focuses on the link between the mind, the brain and the immune system. The white blood cells present in our body are called leucocytes.
- ❖ These help in identifying and destroying the foreign bodies known as antigens. For example, Viruses.
- ❖ They also produce antibodies in our body. They can be further sub-divided into: T cells, B cells and natural killer cells.
  - T cells destroy invaders and help in immune activity.
  - B cells produce antibodies and natural killer cells fight against both viruses and tumors.
  - Stress can affect our natural killer cell known as cytotoxicity.
  - People who suffer from any kind of stress have a reduced number of cytotoxicity, whereas people who have good social support can easily have better immune functioning.

- **Coping with stress**

- ❖ Coping is a dynamic situation specific reaction to stress. For example, when we are stuck in traffic, we feel angry because we feel that the traffic should move quickly.

- Endler and Parker's Coping Techniques**

- (i) **Task-oriented strategy:** This strategy involves obtaining information about the stressful situation and alternative course of action that should bring a positive outcome. For example, we start studying hard as the exams grow nearer.
    - (ii) **Emotion-oriented strategy:** It involves effort to maintain hope and to control one's emotions. It also takes into account venting feelings of anger and frustration and deciding nothing can be done. For example, when people think that why does this always happen only to me?
    - (iii) **Avoidance-oriented strategy:** We deny or minimise the seriousness of the situation by consciously suppressing the stressful situation. For example, when we try to distract our self by indulging in some recreational activity.

- **Lazarus and Folkman's**

- ❖ Lazarus and Folkman have given two types of techniques for coping with stress.

- (i) **Problem-focussed responses:** This strategy attacks the problem itself with behaviour designed to gain information, to alter the event and alter the beliefs and commitments. For example, when the exams come near, we start putting in effort for studies such as making notes, clearing doubts, etc.
  - (ii) **Emotion-focussed responses:** The psychological changes are designed primarily to limit the degree of emotional disturbance that can be caused due to the event. For example, we try to distract our self by watching the TV if we had a fight with our friend.

- **Stress management techniques**

- ❖ **Relaxation:** It helps in reducing the symptoms of stress and also reduces the incidents of illness such as high blood pressure, heart disease, etc. This technique starts from the lower part of the body.
- ❖ **Meditation:** It is a special breathing technique which helps in reducing stress. It also increases the intake of oxygen in our body.
- ❖ **Biofeedback:** It is mostly done to monitor the physiological aspects of stress by providing feedback about our current physiological activity, and often accompanied by relaxation training. **It involves three stages:**
  - (i) Developing an awareness about a particular physiological response.
  - (ii) Controlling that physiological response in a quiet controlled setting.
  - (iii) Applying it in everyday life.
- ❖ **Creative visualisation:** It is a very effective technique for coping. In this technique we use imagery and imagination. Before visualising, one must set oneself a realistic goal as it builds up confidence and it is easier to visualise. Further, the situation should be quiet, the body should be relaxed and eyes should be closed because it reduces the risk of interference from unbidden thoughts and provides a creative energy needed for turning imagined things into reality.
- ❖ **Cognitive behavioural technique:** It is also known as stress inoculation training. It is given by Meichenbaum. The essence of this approach is to replace negative or irrational thoughts into positive or rational one. It has three stages:
  - (i) *Assessment:* We assess the nature of the problem.
  - (ii) *Stress-inoculation technique:* We apply the technique in order to reduce the level of stress.
  - (iii) *Follow up:* Application and follow up.
- ❖ **Exercise:** It improves the efficiency of heart, enhances the function of blood. Improves immune system, reduce fat.

- **Stress-resistant personality**

- ❖ People have a sense of direction in their life. They have commitment for work. They have commitment towards challenges. For example, they see life changes as normal and not as threat.