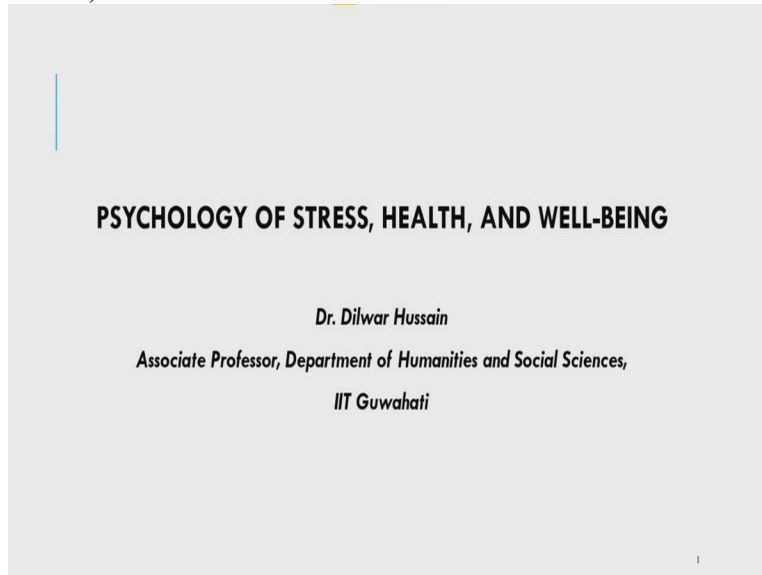


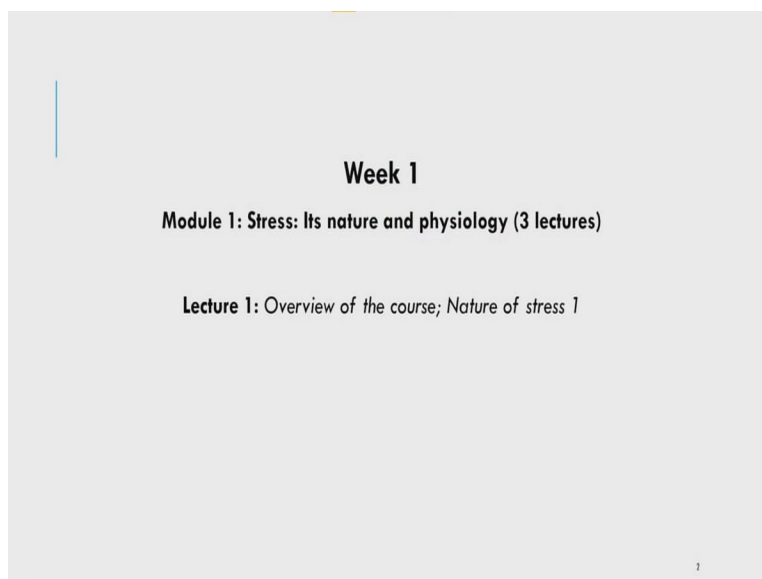
Psychology of Health, Stress and Well-Being
Professor Dilwar Hussain
Department of Humanities and Social Sciences
Indian Institute of Technology, Guwahati
Lecture 1
The Nature of Stress 1

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So, I welcome you to the first lecture of this NPTEL MOOC course titled “Psychology of Stress, Health and Well-Being”. Now, so this is the first lecture of the first week, and it is module number 1.

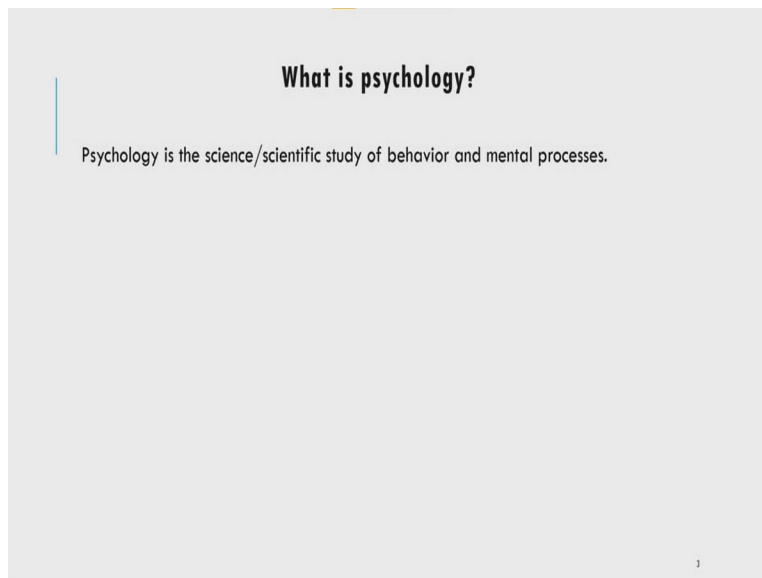
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Module number 1 is titled 'Stress: its nature and Physiology.' So, in this module, we will have 3 lectures. So, today we will start with the first lecture. In the first lecture, I will give you an overview of this course very briefly, and I will talk about the nature of stress in, first part. Now, as the name suggests, this is a course of psychology, and it is specifically tailored to understand the phenomena of stress, health and well-being, and inter-relationship among all these concepts.

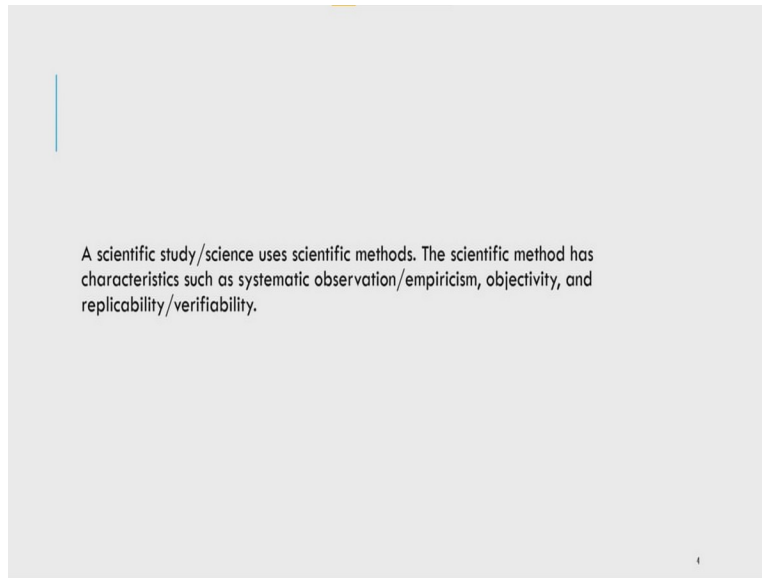
Now, before I go into the overview of this course, let me give you a brief idea about what psychology is all about because many students who are taking this course may not be aware of psychology. So, I will just give you a very brief idea about what psychology is all about so that you can understand what is this discipline, what are the contents of this discipline?

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So, one of the basic definitions of psychology is that psychology is the science or scientific study of behavior and mental processes. So, there are three terms we need to understand, scientific study, behavior, and mental processes.

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Now, psychology claims to be a scientific discipline. What is the meaning of a scientific study or scientific discipline? So, any study, any field of study that uses a scientific method for seeking knowledge or gathering information, can be called a scientific discipline. So, the scientific method is the key term. So, we have pure sciences such as Physics, Chemistry, Biology, and we have Social Sciences such as Psychology, Sociology, etc.

So, the idea is all this discipline uses the scientific method to get information and seek truths and knowledge in the area of that discipline. Now, the scientific method seeks truth through observed evidence and not through authority, ideologies, a tradition where it can be very subjective knowledge. So, it tries to seek knowledge through observed evidence.

Now, there are certain hallmarks of scientific study to be truly called some discipline as science. So, one is obviously systematic observation. So, systematic observation basically means that it is not using selective or random observation. So, when you conclude something based on selective or random observation, it can be biased; it may not be true. So, the scientific method uses systematic observation to come to a conclusion.

Empiricism, the idea of empiricism, is another important term that is used in the context of the scientific method. Empiricism basically means when we seek information or knowledge using our sense organs so that is related to our observation. So, we seek knowledge using our sense

organs. So, the scientific method or science will not study anything that is not detected by using our sense organs.

So, science will not talk about something beyond the observation of our sense organs, such as mysterious paranormal things probably. So, empiricism basically means that it can be observed using our sense organs or detected using our sense organ, five sense organs either directly or by enhancing them using certain instruments such as a telescope, microscope, etc.

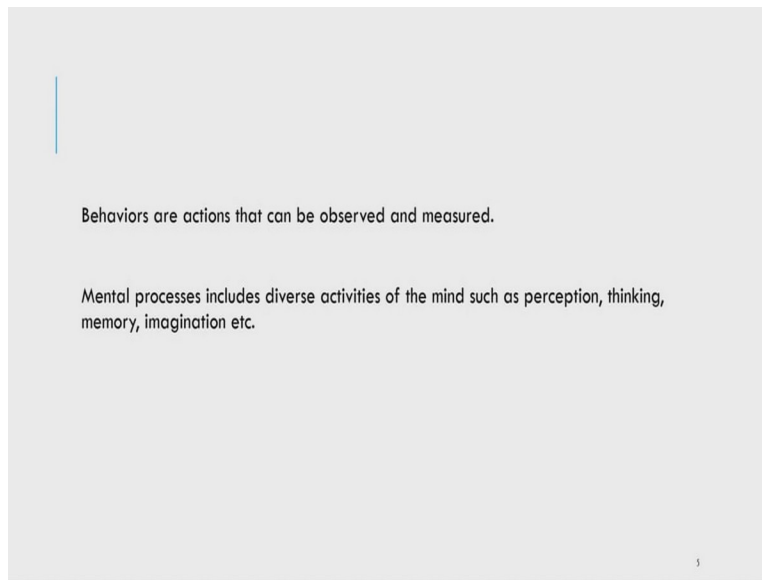
Another important characteristic of science is objectivity. Now, we all have many biases within us, and those biases may kind of create an obstacle while seeking information or knowledge in any area of discipline because I may personally think some information or some ideas as right, which may not be right simply because I personally think so which is my subjective interpretation.

So, in the pursuit of objectivity, basically, a researcher is trying to find ways to gather the information that is not influenced by their own biases or subjectivity. So, objectivity helps you to collect factual knowledge, and subjective knowledge basically changes from person to person depending on his ideas and biases. So, at least in the scientific method, the researchers try to minimize subjectivity and maximize objectivity. This is very important characteristics.

And the third characteristic of the scientific method is replicability or verifiability, which is very important because there are no full-proof ways for social sciences particularly which guarantees pure objectivity in terms of gathering information; that is why verifiability is very important. So, that is why researcher publish research in the journal so that people can use those methods and verify your findings. If you found out something and no other people is able to find out the same result using that same method, then we cannot call it truly objective or truly as a part of the discipline or science.

So, replicability is very important; it has to be verifiable or replicable by using whatever method you have used; then only we can call it true factual knowledge and become a part of scientific discipline. So, these are very important characteristics of scientific discipline. So, when we say psychology as a science or scientific study, we mean that psychology tries to use all these characteristics to gather its information, and all the contents that we study in psychology are basically are concluded using those scientific methods.

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Now, psychology studies behavior. So, the behavior is technically used in psychology to understand or to mean any actions that are observable and that can be measured. So, all the actions that we can see when a person performs such as speaking, walking. All the observable actions which can be measured using some method are called behaviors in psychology.

The mental process is a broad term that basically includes diverse activities of the human mind such as perception, thinking, memory, imagination, etc. All these are collectively called mental processes, and psychology tries to understand all these mental processes and behaviors.

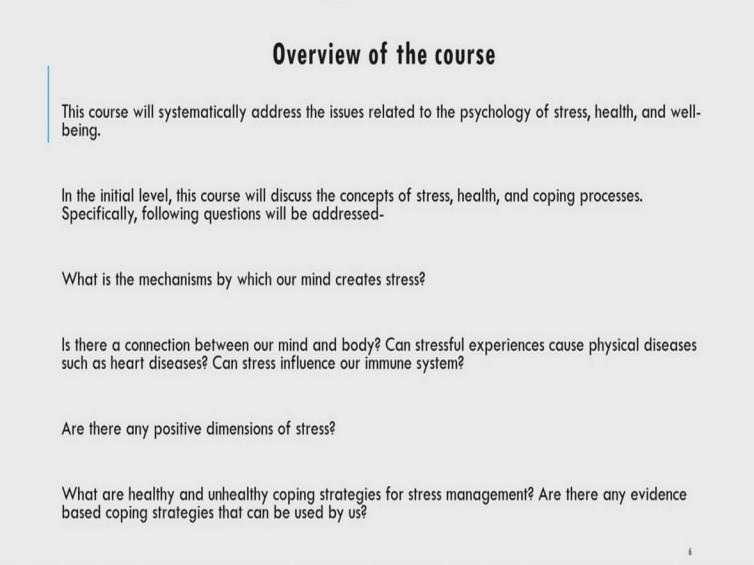
Psychology also looks into human emotions and how it is influenced by our thought processes etc. So, briefly, psychology is a discipline that tries to study diverse aspects or dimensions of human behavior, mental processes. So, it is a very complex field of study. This discipline is a multifaceted discipline just like other disciplines, so it has many sub-branches.

For example, we have clinical psychology that looks at mental disorders and treatments. Then we have organizational behavior, which looks at how humans behave in group situations or in organizational situations.

Then, we have social psychology, which looks at human behavior in the context of social settings. So, we have many such sub-disciplines within psychology to understand specific areas

of human behavior. So, this is a course of psychology specifically tailored to understand stress, health and well-being.

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Overview of the course

This course will systematically address the issues related to the psychology of stress, health, and well-being.

In the initial level, this course will discuss the concepts of stress, health, and coping processes. Specifically, following questions will be addressed-

What is the mechanisms by which our mind creates stress?

Is there a connection between our mind and body? Can stressful experiences cause physical diseases such as heart diseases? Can stress influence our immune system?

Are there any positive dimensions of stress?

What are healthy and unhealthy coping strategies for stress management? Are there any evidence based coping strategies that can be used by us?

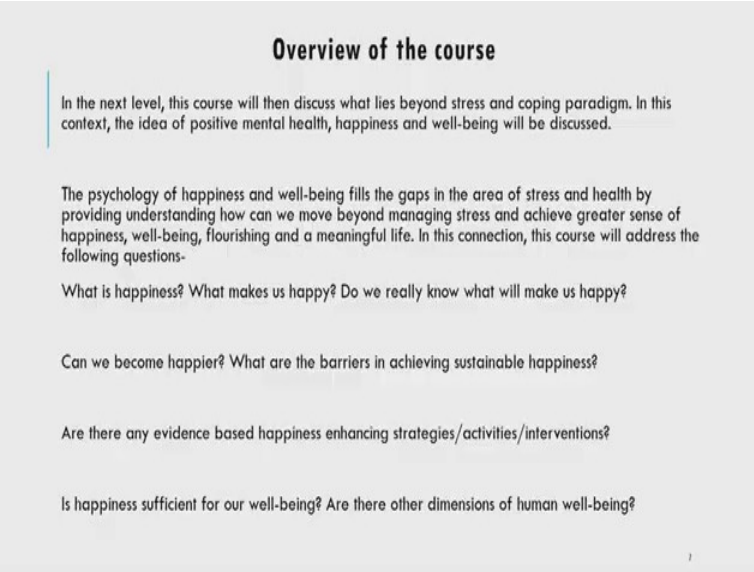
So, let me give you an overview of this course. So, this course will systematically address the issues related to the psychology of stress, health and well-being. In the initial level, this course will discuss the concepts of stress, health and coping processes. How we experience stress and how it is related to human mental and physical health and what are the coping processes and how can we cope with different difficulties and stressful situations of our life.

So, specifically, we will address the following questions in these initial few sections such as what is the mechanism by which our mind creates stress? So, we will try to understand deeply what the mental processes by which we create stress in our mind are? Then, we will also look at is there a connection between our mind and body? Can stressful experiences cause physical diseases such as heart diseases? Can stress influence our immune system? So basically we will look at how stress is connected to physical health.

So, we will see the mind-body interaction in the context of stress. We will also discuss are there any positive dimensions of stress? We will also discuss what are the healthy and unhealthy coping strategies for stress management? So these are also very important.

We use many coping strategies in our day to day life; some are healthy, some are unhealthy. So, we look into all these aspects and we will also address are there any evidence based coping strategies that can be used by us. So, we look into many healthy coping strategies that we can use in the context of stressful situations or traumatic situations.

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Overview of the course

In the next level, this course will then discuss what lies beyond stress and coping paradigm. In this context, the idea of positive mental health, happiness and well-being will be discussed.

The psychology of happiness and well-being fills the gaps in the area of stress and health by providing understanding how can we move beyond managing stress and achieve greater sense of happiness, well-being, flourishing and a meaningful life. In this connection, this course will address the following questions-

- What is happiness? What makes us happy? Do we really know what will make us happy?
- Can we become happier? What are the barriers in achieving sustainable happiness?
- Are there any evidence based happiness enhancing strategies/activities/interventions?
- Is happiness sufficient for our well-being? Are there other dimensions of human well-being?

In the next level of this course, we will discuss what lies beyond the stress and coping paradigm. So, we will not just talk about stress and coping. We will also talk about ideas that are beyond stress and coping paradigm such as positive mental health, happiness and well-being.

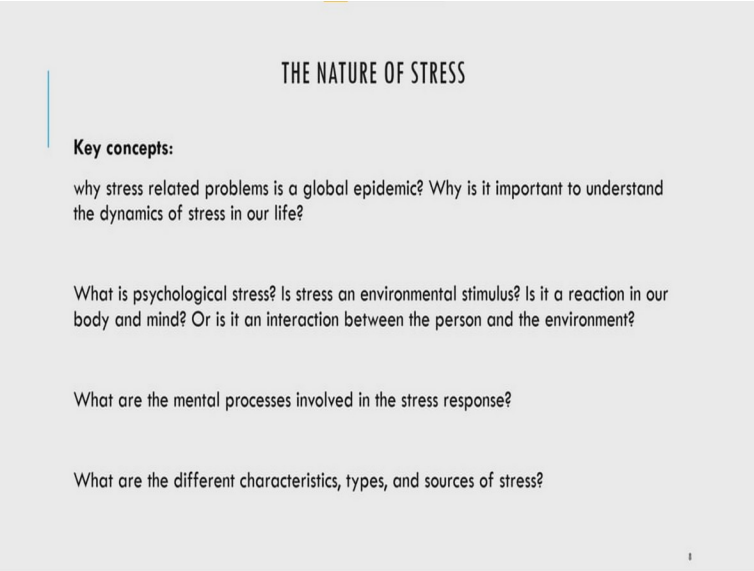
So, the psychology of happiness and well-being fills these gaps in the area of stress and health by providing an understanding of how we can move beyond managing stress and achieve a greater sense of happiness and well-being and a flourishing and meaningful life.

So, in this connection, we will try to address some of the important questions, such as what is happiness? What makes us happy? Do we really know what makes us happy? So, these are very important questions that we will address in this course. We will also address questions such as can we become happier? What are the barriers in achieving sustainable happiness? Is it possible to become happier or can we increase the level of our happiness? So, these are the very important applied question that we will address in this course.

We will also see are there any evidence based happiness enhancing strategies activities or intervention that we can apply in our life to increase the level of happiness? We will also address is happiness sufficient for our well-being or should we look for some other aspects also, other dimensions of human well-being such as meaning and purpose in life? So, all these aspects we will discuss in this course. I believe this course will be an applied and interesting course for all people who are interested into their health, happiness and well-being.

So, we will try to make it as applied as possible, so that we understand various important aspects of our life.

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The slide is titled "THE NATURE OF STRESS" and lists four key concepts:

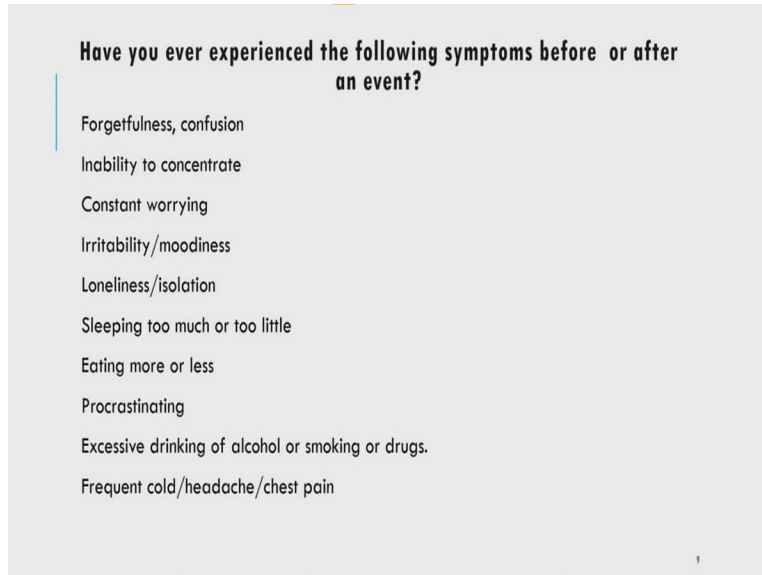
- Key concepts:**
 - why stress related problems is a global epidemic? Why is it important to understand the dynamics of stress in our life?
 - What is psychological stress? Is stress an environmental stimulus? Is it a reaction in our body and mind? Or is it an interaction between the person and the environment?
 - What are the mental processes involved in the stress response?
 - What are the different characteristics, types, and sources of stress?

So, now we will formally start the content of this course. So, the first concept that we will discuss in this course is the nature of stress. So, we will talk about the nature of stress in two lectures. I will talk about the nature of stress first part today, and in the next lecture, we will talk about the nature of stress second part.

So, some of the key concepts that we will discuss under the nature of stress. Key concepts are- why stress-related problem is a global epidemic? Why is it important to understand the dynamics of stress in our life? What is psychological stress? In order to understand the diverse aspect of stress, first, we need to understand the definition of stress. We will also look at what are the mental processes involved in the stress response, that is, how our mind creates stress? So, we

will try to understand and address in this lecture. Also, we will look at different characteristics, types and sources of stress in the next lecture.

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So, I will start with one question. Have you ever experienced the following symptoms before or after an event? Such as forgetfulness, confusion, inability to concentrate, constant worrying, irritability/moodiness, loneliness/isolation, sleeping too much or too little, eating more or less, procrastinating, excessive of drinking or alcohol or smoking or drugs, frequent cold, headache, chest pain, etc.

So, if you have experienced some of these symptoms, one possibility is that you were experiencing stressful events. So, as a response to stress, we mostly experience all these symptoms or some of these symptoms.

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STRESS: A GLOBAL EPIDEMIC

WHO dubbed stress as the health epidemic of the 21st century.

In the context of America, stress is estimated to cost around 300 billion \$ per year and there is an increase in the stress level of about 10-30% between 1983 to 2009 (Fink, 2017).

Recently, in 2019, a global well-being study conducted by Cigna corporation reported that about 82% Indians are suffering from stress on account of work, health and finance-related concerns which is higher than other developed and emerging countries such as the USA, UK, Germany, France and Australia.

The consequences of this rapid increase in the stress level could be devastating in multiple dimensions of our health, well-being and functioning such as physical and mental health, performance, productivity, quality of personal and social life etc. and accounting for a significant burden of disability within nations.

There may be multiple possible reasons behind the rise of stress and its related problems. One major cause could be rapidly changing world increasing challenges and demands.

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Now, we will talk about stress as a global epidemic. WHO dubbed stress as health epidemic of the 21st century simply because this is a global phenomenon and it is constantly rising. At present, as we know, for example, Covid-19 is a pandemic as it is a global phenomenon. Similarly, stress is a global phenomenon, and it is rising everywhere. It is not just a local phenomenon. That is why it is kind of dubbed a global pandemic because its influence is everywhere. Its influence can be seen everywhere.

So, there are many staggering statistics available in terms of rising stress and its implications in various countries. I will just discuss a few of them. In the context of America, stress is estimated to cost around 300 billion dollars per year and there is an increase in the stress level of about 10 to 30 percent between 1983 to 2009. So, this is one of the statistics which shows how rapidly it is increasing and how much cost a country has to bear because of this rise of stress level in terms of its impact on health and well-being of the people. So, we will look into all these dimensions in more detail.

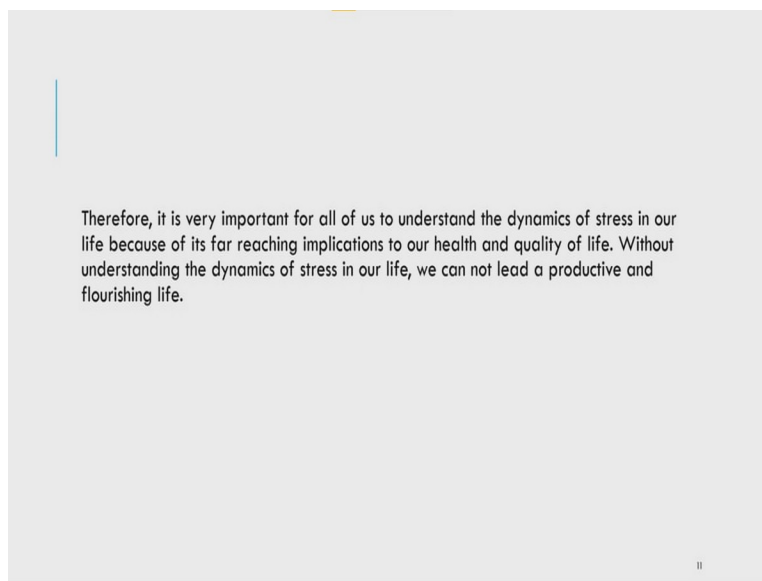
In the context of India, recently in 2019, a global well-being study was conducted by Cigna Corporation. It reported that about 82 percent of Indians are suffering from stress on account of work, health, and finance-related concerns which is higher than other developed and emerging countries such as USA, UK, Germany, France, and Australia. So, in the context of India, the situation is also very bad, and in some sense, it is even more than developed countries. There are

huge consequences of such rising stress in terms of its devastating impact on multiple dimensions of our life such as health, well-being and our functioning in life. So, it has negative impact on our health, well-being and functioning of our life such as physical health, mental health, performance, productivity, quality of personal and social life etc. Furthermore, it is accounting for a significant burden of disability within nations.

So, there can be many reasons for such rises and there can be some local and specific reasons connected to a person's life. But in general, one of the major global reasons is the rapidly changing world. Our world is rapidly changing and it is causing disruptions and any disruptions and changes forces us to adjust to the new environment.

So, those rapid changes are happening everywhere, such as at our lifestyle level, job level, global level, and societal level. So, at all levels, there are rapidly changing situations that we are encountering and such changes force us to adjust to this new environment, and stress is a natural consequence of such changes. However, there can be many individual life-specific reasons for stress. So, globally stress is becoming a pandemic, a kind of global epidemic.

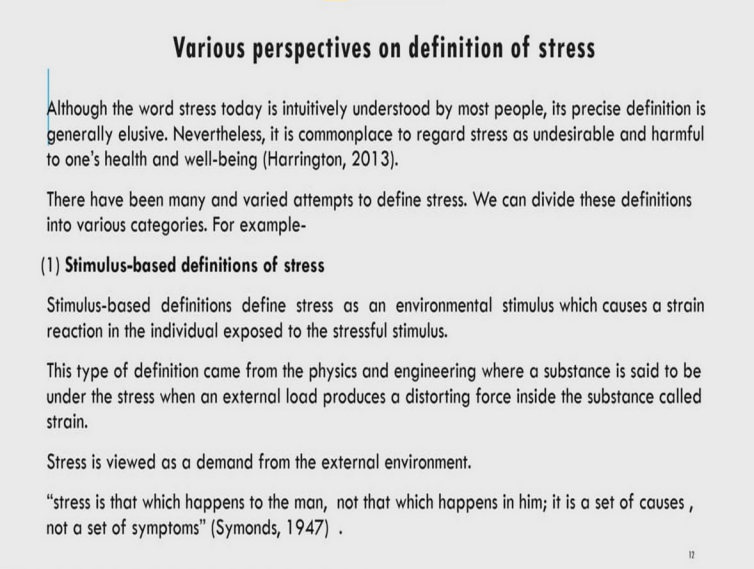
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Therefore, it is very important to understand the dynamics of stress in our life because it has far-reaching implications in our health, well-being, our functioning or quality of life. So, without understanding these dynamics of stress in our life, we will not be able to lead a productive and flourishing life.

So, to lead a productive and flourishing life, we need to understand all these dynamics of stress. Therefore, it is important to understand and reflect on all these issues. So, in this particular course, we are basically trying to understand from the literature of psychology about stress, health and well-being. So, we will try to understand all these diverse aspects throughout this course.

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Various perspectives on definition of stress

Although the word stress today is intuitively understood by most people, its precise definition is generally elusive. Nevertheless, it is commonplace to regard stress as undesirable and harmful to one's health and well-being (Harrington, 2013).

There have been many and varied attempts to define stress. We can divide these definitions into various categories. For example-

(1) Stimulus-based definitions of stress

Stimulus-based definitions define stress as an environmental stimulus which causes a strain reaction in the individual exposed to the stressful stimulus.

This type of definition came from the physics and engineering where a substance is said to be under the stress when an external load produces a distorting force inside the substance called strain.

Stress is viewed as a demand from the external environment.

"stress is that which happens to the man, not that which happens in him; it is a set of causes, not a set of symptoms" (Symonds, 1947) .

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Therefore, before we can really understand the diverse aspect of stress, we need to understand what is stress? Stress is a very commonly used word and may mean many things to many people.

There are many definitions of stress, even in psychology. All these definitions can be categorized into three broad categories - one is called the stimulus-based definition of stress, the second is called as response based definition of stress and third is called the interactional definition of stress. So, we will try to understand what are these three categories of definitions of stress.

So, first is stimulus-based definition of stress. A stimulus is an external event, person, or circumstance that causes a reaction within us. So, any external situation, event, thing that causes a reaction within us can be called as the stimulus. For example, now you may be looking at your mobile screen or computer screen, which is a stimulus as it is causing some internal reactions. You are thinking about something, or it is stimulating some thinking processes.

So, stimulus-based definition of stress basically defines stress as an environmental stimulus that causes a strain reaction in the individual exposed to the stressful situation. Here, stress is defined as a stimulus, as an external stimulus that causes a strain reaction within the individual. The external stimulus is seen as stress which causes a strain reaction within that person. For example, if you were stressed by an upcoming examination, it (examination) will be considered as a main agent of stress.

So, here stress will be looked at from that external event. This type of definition was popular at the initial level and came from the disciplines such as Physics and Engineering, where a substance is said to be under stress when the external load produces a distorting force inside the substance called strain.

So, such kinds of definitions were popular in science such as Physics and Engineering disciplines. So, from there, psychology also borrowed such definition of stimulus based definition of stress. Here, stress is primarily viewed as a demand from the external environment. One such definition was given by Symonds in 1947. He defined, 'Stress is that which happens to the man, not that which happens in him; it is a set of causes and not a set of symptoms'. So, this was the idea, and it was mostly at the initial phase of research such definitions were popular and primarily, they were borrowed from the Physics and Engineering discipline.

However, such definitions are no longer popular primarily because this definition is very narrow and limiting. So, we will see why it is narrow and limiting while discussing other categories of definitions.

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Stimulus based definitions are not in popular use now as researchers found such definitions as very narrow and limiting.

Response-based definition of stress

Response based definitions focus on the response to the stressful stimuli as the actual stress itself. The response is primarily viewed in terms of the physiological response patterns in the body as a result of stressful stimuli.

One of the most popular definition in this category is-

“stress is the non-specific response of the body to any demand made upon it” (Selye 1974).

Response-based definitions of stress are also no longer popular in use just like stimulus based definitions because of its limitations.

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Another set of definitions called a response-based definition of stress. A response-based definition of stress views stress as a response within that individual and not as a stimulus (as it was conceptualized in the stimulus based definition.)

So, response based definitions focus on the response to the stressful stimuli as the actual stress itself. So, whatever response happens after encountering an external stimulus, stress is considered as that response. The response is primarily viewed in terms of physiological response. So, in these definitions, the response was seen as a physiological response such as an increase in the heartbeat and chemical changes within the body.

One of the most popular definitions of this category was given by Hans Selye in 1974. He was one of the founding researchers in the area of stress. He defined, “stress is the non-specific response of the body to any demand made upon it”. So, he said stress consists of the response of the body, non-specific response, which means some general response that happens to your body as some demands are made from an external environment. Similar to stimulus based definition, response based definition of stress is also no longer popular primarily because they are also limiting and the focus is narrow.

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Interactional definition of stress

Interactional definition of stress was developed as a response to the shortcomings of the stimulus and response based definitions. Here stress is defined in terms of interaction between the environment (stimulus) and the person (response).

One of the most popular definition of stress in this category is proposed by Richard Lazarus and Susan Folkman (1984). It states that-

"stress is a particular relationship between the person and the environment that is appraised by the person as taxing or exceeding his or her resources and endangering his or her well-being"

This definition is more process-oriented and takes account of the dynamic nature of the stress relationship between the person and the environment.

Contemporary researchers view stress mostly in terms of interactional perspective.

This perspective looks at stress as a subjective phenomenon which depends on the appraisals and perception of the individual

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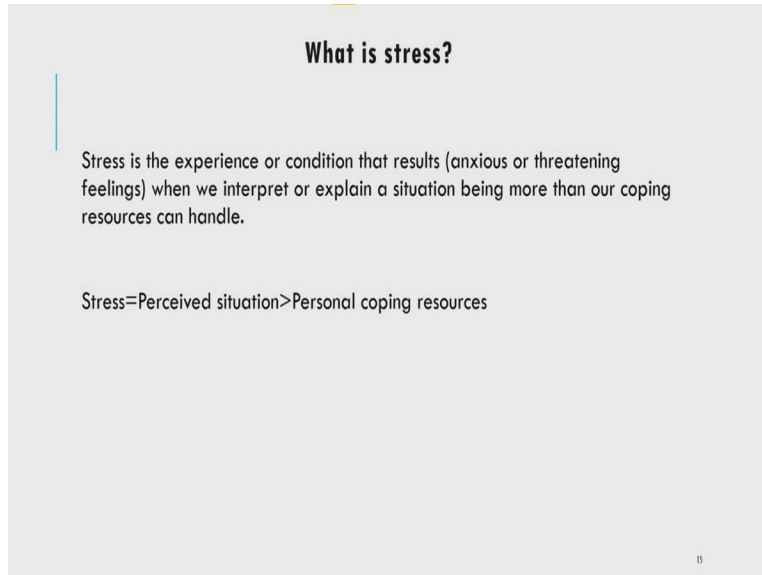
The third category of definitions is called interactional definitions of stress. Here, it is a kind of combination of both stimulus and response based definition, and it defines stress as an interaction between the person and the environment. Stress is an outcome of an interaction between the person and the environment. So, it is neither seen as a stimulus nor seen as an only response. It is more like an interaction between these two.

One of such popular definitions in this category is proposed by Richard Lazarus and Susan Folkman in 1984, which is one of the most cited definitions of stress. It defined, 'stress is a particular relationship between the person and the environment that is appraised by the person as taxing or exceeding his or her resources and endangering his or her well-being'. Here, stress is seen as an interaction between the person and his environment, and when that person interprets an environmental situation as taxing or something that he will not be able to deal with, then stress is the response that happens as a result of this interaction.

So, this definition is more process-oriented, and it accounts for the dynamic nature of stress, not just a static concept of stress. So, nowadays, if you see in the literature of psychology, the most popular definition of stress are basically the interactional definition of stress. So, if you see the definition of stress in psychology, it will be mostly from the interactional perspective and it is the most popular definition and most accepted definition at present.

Now, this perspective looks at stress as a subjective phenomenon simply because it includes interpretation of the event.

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What is stress?

Stress is the experience or condition that results (anxious or threatening feelings) when we interpret or explain a situation being more than our coping resources can handle.

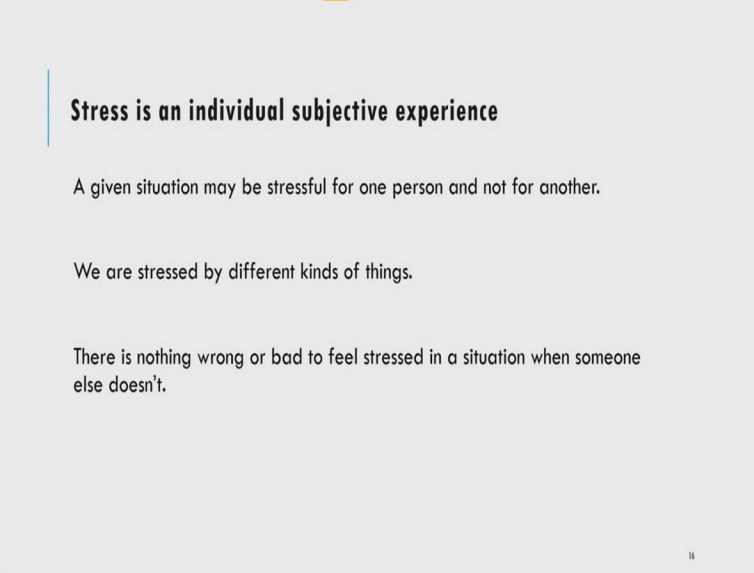
Stress=Perceived situation>Personal coping resources

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So, when we conceptualize stress or talk about stress in psychology, we are typically talking about stress as the experience or the condition that results when we interpret or explain a situation being more than our coping resources can handle.

So, whenever we interpret a situation as something that is more than our coping abilities. So, stress results whenever I interpret that I will not be able to deal with the situation. So, stress results when the perceived situation is considered as greater than our personal coping resources. So, this is the basic idea of stress when we talk about it in psychology.

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Stress is an individual subjective experience

- A given situation may be stressful for one person and not for another.
- We are stressed by different kinds of things.
- There is nothing wrong or bad to feel stressed in a situation when someone else doesn't.

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Now, one of the aspects we have already talked about is that stress is a subjective experience simply because a given situation can be stressful for one person, and it may not be stressful for another person. So, if you put, let us say 5 persons in a particular stressful situation. Some individuals may experience high stress, and some may feel low stress, some may not feel stressed. Why are these individual differences? It is primarily because these individuals are interpreting the situation differently. That is why it is called a subjective response, or it is a result of subjective interpretation. For example, appearing in an examination can be stressful for one student and it may not be that stressful for another student. It depends on how that student is interpreting the examination.

If he thinks I am well prepared and I can do well, it will not be that stressful. On the other hand, if a student interprets examination as something for which he is not prepared, then it is more likely to be stressful. So, this difference is coming because two students are interpreting the examination differently.

So, we are stressed by different kinds of things and there is nothing wrong or bad to feel stressed in a situation when someone else does not. So, if someone else is not feeling stressed in a situation and I am feeling stressed, there is nothing wrong with it as it depends on that person's interpretation processes. One person may not be experiencing stress in a situation simply because that situation is not relevant for that person, and it may be relevant for me; that is why I am

experiencing more stress. So, all these individual differences may be there when we talk about stress.

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What makes something as stressful?

- The amount of stress each person experiences depends on his or her understanding/belief about a situation/event (dangerous, threatening etc.).
- Different things are stressful for different people largely because-
 - The meaning of the event differs from person to person
 - People have different resources available for dealing with a stressful situation.

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So, what makes something stressful? The amount of stress each person experiences depends on his or her understanding/belief about a situation or event. So, when we interpret a situation, obviously, it depends on many things such as our understanding of the situation, our beliefs about the situations, etc., which will influence the stress response and our interpretation process.

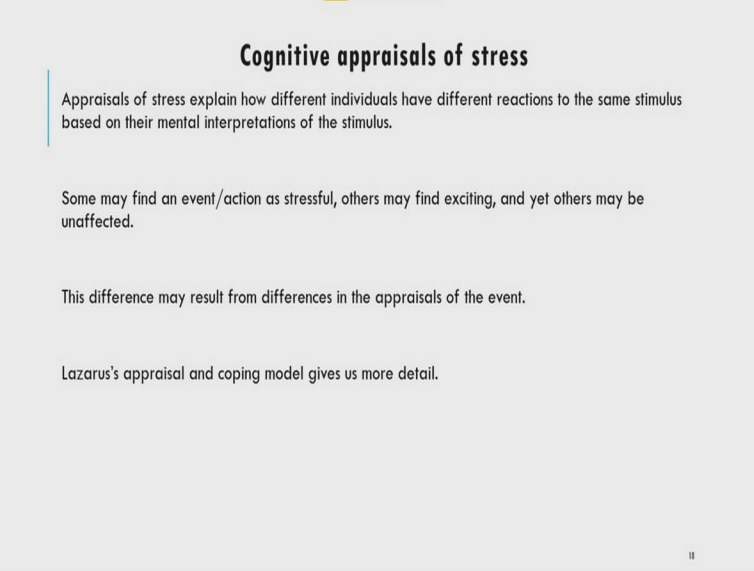
So, different things are stressful for different people largely because the meaning of the event differs from person to person. Also, people have different resources available for dealing with stressful situations. So, one thing is the interpretation of the situation itself, and another thing is the interpretation of how much resources you have to handle a situation. So, we will look into that part also. So, these interpretation processes are very important.

In most of the situation, this interpretation process could be unconscious and automatic because of our past habits. So, you encounter a situation and it automatically triggers stress reactions because those interpretations could be very ingrained in your mind, unconscious mind and it can be very automatic, unconscious, and habitual.

So, many times you may not see all this interpretation going on in your mind simply because it is happening very fast and at the unconscious level. However, there is a piece of good news in that

simply because if stress is happening because of our interpretation process, one thing is that we can change that interpretation process. We will look into how we can change all these interpretation processes while discussing coping strategies.

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Cognitive appraisals of stress

Appraisals of stress explain how different individuals have different reactions to the same stimulus based on their mental interpretations of the stimulus.

Some may find an event/action as stressful, others may find exciting, and yet others may be unaffected.

This difference may result from differences in the appraisals of the event.

Lazarus's appraisal and coping model gives us more detail.

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Now we will discuss cognitive appraisals of stress. So, cognitive appraisals basically mean assessment or interpretation. So, we will see in more detail how this interpretation happens and what are the different types of interpretation that happen when we experience a stressful situation?

So, appraisal of stress explains how different individuals have different reactions. As we have already seen that different people react to the same situation in different ways. So, cognitive appraisals can explain these differences. Some people may find an event as stressful; others may find it exciting, and some other people may be unaffected by the same event. So, all these diverse reactions can happen. For example, let us take the case of giving a public lecture or public speaking. If you want to give a speech in front of people, it could be in the schools, or it could be in any other forums. Some individual may find it a very stressful event simply because he is interpreting public speaking as a threat because he/she may think that- I may not be able to speak properly, I may fumble, what others will think about me and so on.

All this interpretation process will make this public speaking event for one person very stressful. Another person may see the same event as an opportunity or as a challenge to grow or show

one's skill, and he may feel excited about it. So, all these diverse reaction can happen and it is happening because of all these differences in the appraisal of the event. Richard Lazarus gave a model of this interpretation process or appraisal, so we will just look into it.

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Lazarus's appraisal and coping model

Lazarus and Folkman (1984) proposed a three-process cognitive appraisals consisting of primary appraisal, secondary appraisal, and reappraisal.

Primary Appraisal: Here people judge a particular event/situation as positive or negative.

According to Lazarus, events can be appraised during primary appraisal in three possible ways. They can be seen as irrelevant, relevant but not threatening, or stressful.

Stressful reactions occur when the situation is judged as potentially involving harm-loss, threat, and/or challenge.

- Harm-loss appraisals are past or present oriented and result from appraisals of loss or damage that is happening or has already happened. The losses may include loss of money, job, or psychological loss such as loss of self-esteem.
- Threat appraisals are future oriented. When the future suggests the possibility of harm or loss, the person will experience threat.
- Challenge appraisals see the potential for gain or growth. Threat appraisals generally evoke negative emotions such as anxiety, fear, and anger, but challenge appraisals evoke feelings of excitement, eagerness, and exhilaration.

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Lazarus and Folkman, in 1984, proposed a three cognitive appraisal process in the stress reaction model. One is the primary appraisal, the second is the secondary appraisal, and the third is reappraisal. So, what is a primary appraisal? In the primary appraisal, people judge a particular event or situation as either positive or negative. At the initial level, we judge a situation as positive or negative. So, this interpretation or appraisal is called as the primary appraisal.

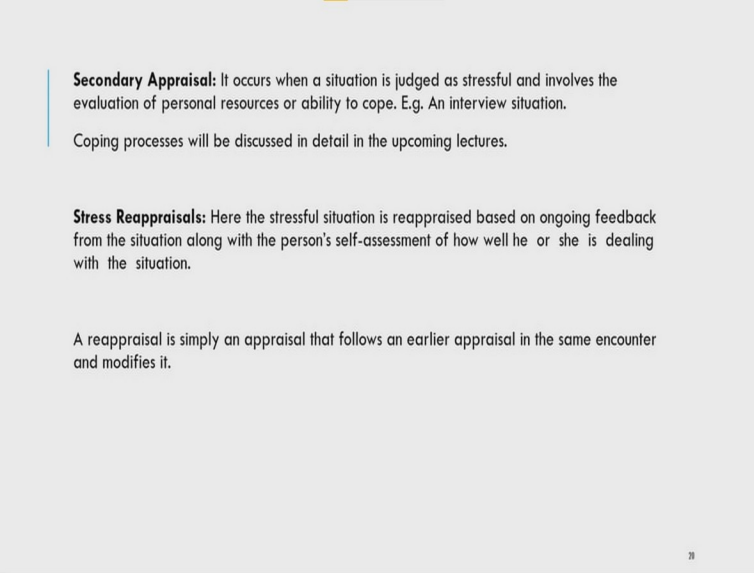
In the process of primary appraisal, a situation can be judged in terms of potential harm/loss, threat or challenge particularly when we interpret a situation as stressful. When you interpret a situation as irrelevant or relevant but not threatening for you. In that case, it will not have much influence on you. For example, let us take the earlier example of examination. So, when you are fully prepared for the examination, here it is relevant for you but not threatening as you are fully prepared for it. So, it will not be that stressful. An event becomes stressful when we make the judgment in terms of harm loss, threat, or challenge. These three interpretations are particularly associated with stressful experiences. Harm/loss appraisals are related to past and present experiences. Here you see some kind of loss or damage that is happening or has already happened because of an event. So, it could be losses in terms of loss of money, job or even

psychological loss in terms of loss of self-esteem. So, such harm/loss interpretation may stimulate stress reactions. Threat appraisal primarily happens in the case of future-oriented interpretations. So, when you see a future possibility of harm and loss, then it is called a threat. For example, there is an upcoming presentation for you in your organization. Now, you may see it as a threatening event if you interpret it in terms of, say, a bad presentation may hamper my future possibility of promotion.

Challenge appraisal is very different, actually. Here basically, a person sees a possibility for growth and gain from a situation. So, I see it as a challenge simply because I see there is an opportunity for growth from the event. So, challenging tasks are neither too easy nor too difficult or impossible. So, it is not typically stress in that sense, but it is more in the positive direction as it motivates people to grow.

So, threat appraisal generally evokes negative emotions such as anxiety, fear, and anger, but challenge appraisal evokes feelings of excitement, eagerness, and exhilarations. There is a kind of positive aspect to challenge appraisal. Now, the threat and challenge appraisal may differ depending on the personal characteristics of the person also. For example, people with low self-esteem may see even promotion (a positive event) as a threat because they may think if I get promoted, will I be able to deal with the newer demands of that job? Whereas other persons may see promotion as an opportunity for growth and show one's capabilities, etc. So, it may depend on personal characteristics.

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Secondary Appraisal: It occurs when a situation is judged as stressful and involves the evaluation of personal resources or ability to cope. E.g. An interview situation.

Coping processes will be discussed in detail in the upcoming lectures.

Stress Reappraisals: Here the stressful situation is reappraised based on ongoing feedback from the situation along with the person's self-assessment of how well he or she is dealing with the situation.

A reappraisal is simply an appraisal that follows an earlier appraisal in the same encounter and modifies it.

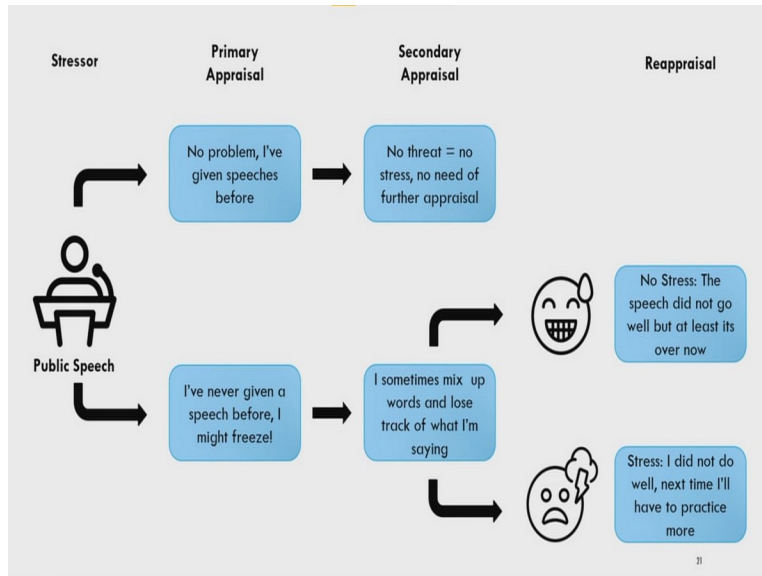
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Then comes the secondary appraisal. After the primary appraisals, secondary appraisals take place where one evaluates the necessary resources to deal with a situation.

While doing secondary appraisals, one may evaluate, do I have the necessary skills to deal with the situation? Do I have the necessary support system in terms of social support to deal with the situation? Do I have the necessary material resources such as money to deal with the situation? For example, in an interview situation, you may interpret it as a threatening situation in primary appraisal and may evaluate whether you have the necessary skills (such as communication skills, knowledge) to face an interview in the secondary appraisal. So, if you perceive that you have all these skills probably, you will feel less stress as compared to someone who thinks he does not have these skills. Coping processes will be discussed in detail in the upcoming lectures.

Then stress reappraisal is the third process where you do reassessment based on the ongoing feedback from the situation, which may have further consequences. So, during the event or after the event, one may assess again how one has performed in the situation. So, this is called as reappraisals, which is appraising again of what happened based on the feedback from the situation.

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So, these whole three processes can be diagrammatically shown like this. So, let us use an example of public speaking. In primary appraisal, you just judge this event of public speaking as positive or negative. So, in the primary appraisal, you may say it is not a problem because I have given many speeches before, so you may not feel that stressed. But let us say in the primary appraisal level you think that I have never given a speech before. I might freeze, may not perform well, etc. So, you are kind of interpreting that situation as threatening. It is more likely to have stressful consequences. However, at the secondary appraisal level, you may think that there is no threat as I have the necessary skills and knowledge to deliver a public talk. However, in the second case where you have interpreted is a threatening event, in the secondary level you may interpret that I may mix up words and lose track, I am not skilled enough, I do not have the necessary skill to give a public speech. So, it is again likely to increase the stress, and in the reappraisal again, you may say, for example, the speech did not go well, but at least it is over now. You may feel a little relaxed. However, stress may continue when you think that I did not do well; next time I will have to practice more. So, all these things may happen at the reappraisal phase based on the feedback from the situation.

So, all these diverse assessments or calculations may take place consciously or unconsciously in our mind resulting in stressful experiences. So, you can do a small exercise; next time when you experience stress probably, you can look at your mind and observe what kind of primary appraisal, what kind of secondary appraisal and what kind of reappraisal you are doing as a response to that event. So, you will probably become more conscious of all these processes and

may find some relevance and connection with this model. So, with this, I end end today's lecture.

Thank you!