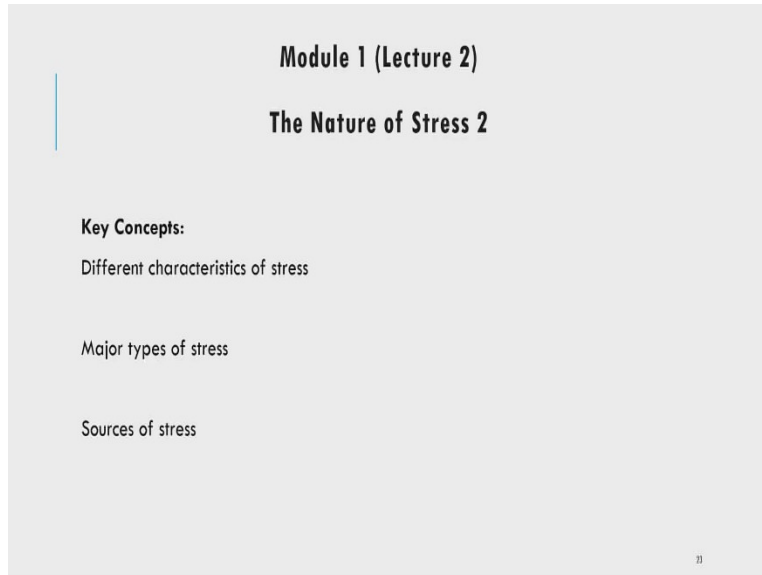


Psychology of Stress, Health and Well-being
Professor Dr. Dilwar Hussain
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Module 1 (Lecture 2)
The Nature of Stress 2

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Module 1 (Lecture 2)

The Nature of Stress 2

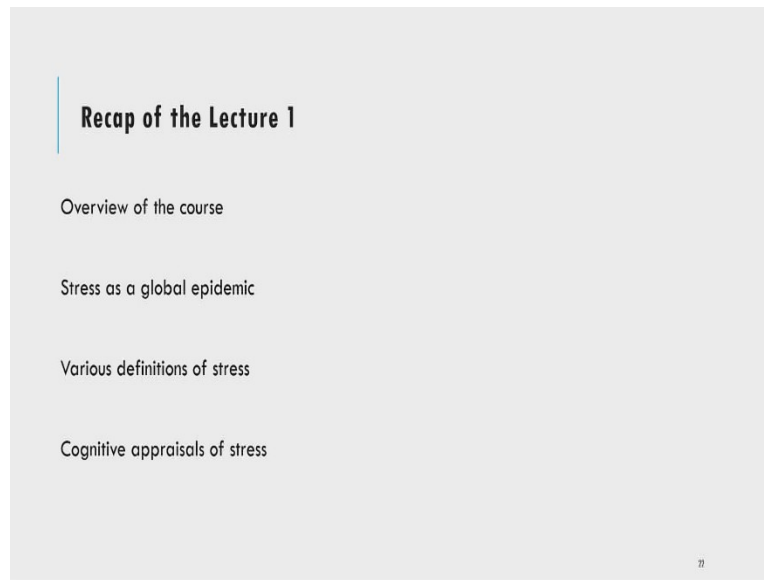
Key Concepts:

- Different characteristics of stress
- Major types of stress
- Sources of stress

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So, I welcome you all to this second lecture of module one of the NPTEL MOOC course titled "Psychology of Stress, Health and Well Being". So the title of today's lecture is "The Nature of Stress Part 2" so before we talk about today's lecture, let me briefly give you a recap of lecture 1.

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In the first lecture, we gave an overview of the course, where we try to understand the important concepts that will be discussed in this course, the major questions that will be addressed in this course. Then we talked about stress as a global epidemic. WHO dubbed stress as a global epidemic, primarily because it is a global issue and rising continuously. Furthermore, it has many implications and repercussions in adversely impacting our health, wellbeing, and functioning in daily life.

Therefore, it is essential to understand how it impacts our lives and the dynamics of stress in our lives. One of the reasons we have discussed why it is rising so much is primarily because of the rapidly changing environment and the social situations around us. Any changes cause disruptions, and stress is a natural consequence of that. Therefore, we need to understand all these dynamics of stress to understand its impact on our lives primarily.

Then, we also talked about various definitions of stress. We primarily discussed three categories of the definition of stress in psychology. One category of definitions is called stimulus-based definitions. Basically, here, stress is defined mostly in terms of a stimulus or an external event or situation that causes a strained reaction within us. So, it is mainly looked as an environmental demand.

Then we talked about response-based definitions where stress is mostly defined in terms of the response that happens within us in reaction to external demand. Typically, people used to look at

physiological responses. These two categories or definitions, stimulus-based definition, and response-based definitions had limitations. They are primarily very limiting and not looking into the dynamic aspect of stress, so they are no longer used.

So at present, the third category of more popular definitions is called the interactional definition of stress. Here, typically stress is defined as an interaction or as an outcome of an interaction between the person and the environment. So, stress is neither a stimulus nor just a response but results from the person's interpretation of the environmental stimuli. So, stress results from the interaction between the person and the environment. This is the most popular category of definition when you talk about stress in psychology.

Then, we talked about cognitive appraisals of stress. Cognitive appraisal is about how we interpret a situation and how that interpretation process leads to a stress reaction. We discussed Lazarus and Folkman's stress response model, where we talked about three appraisal processes that happen in a stress response. One is the primary appraisal, where we judge a situation either as positive or negative. Here, if we judge a situation as irrelevant to us or as relevant but not threatening, we may not have any stress reaction in both of these cases because these are not threatening, and in one case, it is not relevant at all to me. However, stress results when we interpret a situation in terms of harm loss, threat, or challenge. So all this interpretation is basically conceptualized under primary appraisal.

Then comes the secondary appraisal. Here, we try to analyze or interpret how much resources we have. One may think, do I have enough resources, skills, and abilities to deal with the situation. The third phase or third process of appraisal is called as reappraisal phase. Here, based on the ongoing feedback from the situation, I may again interpret the situation in terms of how I am doing, whether I am doing good, and so on. So, these were the major concepts that we have discussed in the last class.

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Module 1 (Lecture 2)

The Nature of Stress 2

Key Concepts:

Different characteristics of stress

Major types of stress

Sources of stress

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Today, we will talk about different characteristics of stress, major types of stress, and major sources of stress. Before we go into that, I will add a few more concepts in the definition of stress. Now there are a few terms that are very common, sometimes interchangeably used, and they create a lot of confusion. These terms are stress, anxiety, and phobia. It is often difficult to distinguish between stress and anxiety because they mostly co-occur together, and both are emotional reactions; symptoms are also very similar. But there are subtle differences between stress and anxiety. One thing is that an external trigger typically causes stress. Whenever there is a specific trigger, we generally experience stress in response to that trigger or a stimulus. Symptoms could include irritability, anger, fatigue, difficulty in concentration, etc. On the other hand, anxiety is generally defined in terms of persistent and excessive worries that typically do not go away when the trigger is gone or in the absence of the trigger also it may remain. Generally, anxiety is a kind of reaction to stress, or it is triggered by stress, and it may remain in the absence of the trigger. Sometimes, anxiety can become a full-fledged mental disorder or illness. Some people have a generalized anxiety disorder, which basically includes people who are in general anxious most of the time without any specific reasons. Some people may have social anxiety, for example, where people are highly anxious in going to social situations or situations where they have to interact with a group of people. So there are some differences between stress and anxiety. Sometimes, fear also often co-occurs with stress and anxiety. Fear is also an emotional response, just like stress and anxiety, and generally, it happens to a known and specific threat. So you see a snake, the response is fear. So, it is a very definite, specific threat.

Anxiety is mostly an emotional response to an imprecise, sometimes unknown threat or imaginary threat, and mostly it happens in anticipation, such as what will happen? And worries about what has not, as of now, happened, but it is mostly in anticipation you are worrying about something. For example, you sense that your boss is not happy with you and he is not approving your work, so you start worrying, 'I may lose my job. My boss may not be happy with me. Why is it happening?' So, all these create anxiety. So, it is mostly in anticipation. Here he has not been thrown out as of now, but he is anticipating. So all this anticipation process generally comes under anxiety. And it may be imprecise and indefinite, not a very definite kind of threat.

So, fear, stress, and anxiety may have many commonalities, but there are subtle differences, and each of these may trigger the other. So, sometimes, it is difficult to distinguish or make a difference between them. With these few introductory concepts, I would like to start today's lecture, 'The Nature of Stress Part 2'.

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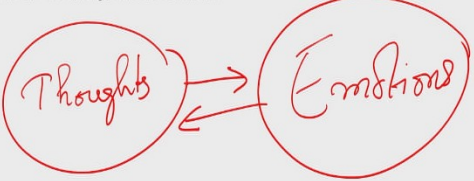
Characteristics of stress

Stress is subjective and may be self created

People are not very objective in their appraisals of potentially stressful events. Some people are more prone to feel threatened by life's difficulties than others.

A large chunk of our stressful experiences could be self created by our pessimistic and maladaptive thought processes.

A large chunk of our sufferings are self created.



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So, we will start talking about different characteristics of stress. So one major characteristic that we have discussed in the first class is that stress is subjective. We have discussed earlier that it depends on how you interpret a situation; largely, it depends on that.

Since it is subjective and depends on our interpretation process, many stressful reactions are self-created. Self-created means we may exaggerate a situation and make it more stressful by excessive thinking. So, people are not very objective in their appraisal of potentially stressful events; most of the time, we are not very objective, so we exaggerate things. Some people are more prone to feel threatened by life difficulties than others, and those individual differences can be there. A large chunk of our stressful experiences could be self-created by our pessimistic and maladaptive thought processes. So one thing is we need to understand that our thoughts and emotions are interconnected to each other. We can show it like this.

So both thoughts and emotions are interrelated to each other. They influence each other. So, the relationship is bidirectional. The kind of thought that we have will trigger a similar kind of emotion. So if you have negative thoughts, it will trigger negative emotions. Similarly, if you have negative emotions, it will trigger negative thoughts. Likewise, our pessimistic thoughts or maladaptive thought processes can trigger negative emotions and exaggerate stress and negative emotions in a situation. For example, you fail in an event, and it may create a stressful reaction and negative emotions. However, if you start thinking that I am a failure in life or I may not

succeed in my life again, I am a worthless fellow, and so on. So, if you start thinking like that, a spiral of negative thoughts starts. Those thoughts will intensify negative emotions and stressful reactions, and you will become more stressed. The more stressed you become, the more negative emotions you get, they will trigger more negative thoughts, so it becomes a vicious circle. This is how many stress and emotional reactions are self-created and exaggerated by our thought processes. We will look into the details of all these things in the coping processes, how we self create, and how we can stop it. So, stress is subjective, and it may be self-created also.

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Characteristics of stress...Contd.

- Stress is an everyday event**
Many everyday events such as waiting in line, having car trouble, misplacing things etc. can be stressful and are called as daily hassles.
- A major stressful events, such as divorce can trigger a cascade of many minor stressors such as taking new responsibilities.
- Daily hassles may have significant negative effects on a person's mental and physical health (DeLongis, Folkman, & Lazarus, 1988).

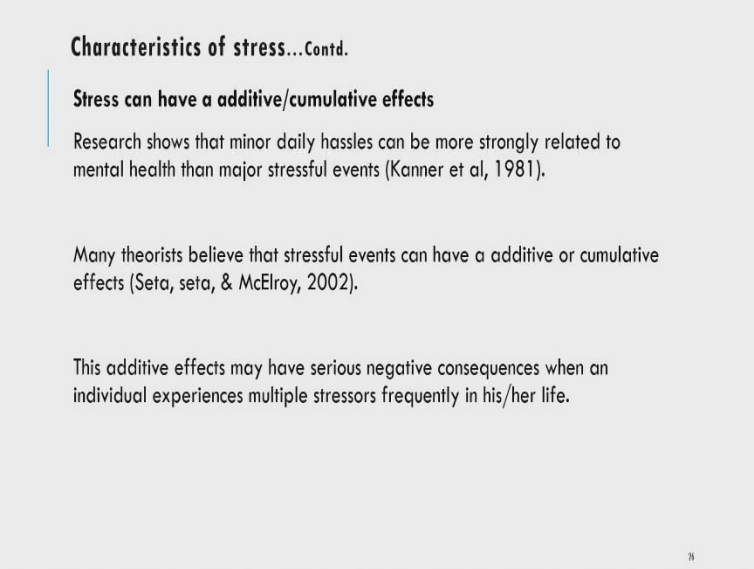
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Another characteristic of stress is that it is an everyday event. So, we all experience stress daily - waiting in a line, having trouble in our car, misplacing things. All these are called daily hassles, and they are part of our life on a daily basis.

Sometimes, a major stressful event such as divorce can trigger a cascade of many minor stressors, such as taking on new responsibilities. So, sometimes a major event may cause many minor additions of stressful events in our life. For example, when someone gets divorced, one may need to take on many new responsibilities which were earlier done by one's spouse, such as cooking or financial burden. So one major stressful event can cause a cascade of many other minor stressful events.

Now, daily hassles may have a significant negative effect on a person's mental and physical health. So we may think they are very small things and small events in our lives, but they may have an adverse impact on our mental and physical health in the long term.

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Characteristics of stress...Contd.

Stress can have a additive/cumulative effects

Research shows that minor daily hassles can be more strongly related to mental health than major stressful events (Kanner et al, 1981).

Many theorists believe that stressful events can have a additive or cumulative effects (Seta, seta, & McElroy, 2002).

This additive effects may have serious negative consequences when an individual experiences multiple stressors frequently in his/her life.

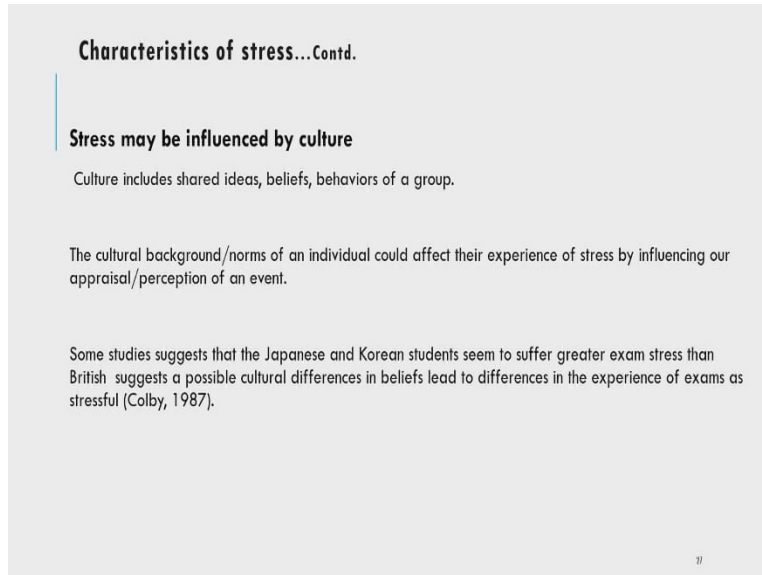
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The next characteristic of stress is that stress can have additive or cumulative effects. Research shows that minor daily hassles can be more strongly related to mental health than major stressful events. Major stressful events occasionally happen in our life, but daily hassles happen regularly and frequently. Therefore, they may have more severe repercussions for our mental and physical health. An example of the additive effect of stress can be, let us say you start your day in the morning and there is a quarrel at your home that made you stressed. Then, while going to your office, there is a traffic jam that made you further stressed. Then, you go to your office, and your boss scolds you, which made you further stressed. So all these three stressful events are getting accumulated in your system as you are not releasing them. Before releasing, one more event is happening. All this stress is getting accumulated in your system, even in your physiology. We will look into the physiology part in the upcoming classes. So all these additive and cumulative effects can have, in the long term, may cause many negative impacts on your mental and physical health.

So, this additive effect may have serious negative consequences when individuals experience multiple stresses frequently in their overall lives. So it becomes a problem, especially when we

experience numerous such events daily. Then obviously it is bound to have negative consequences in our life.

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Characteristics of stress...Contd.

Stress may be influenced by culture

Culture includes shared ideas, beliefs, behaviors of a group.

The cultural background/norms of an individual could affect their experience of stress by influencing our appraisal/perception of an event.

Some studies suggests that the Japanese and Korean students seem to suffer greater exam stress than British suggests a possible cultural differences in beliefs lead to differences in the experience of exams as stressful (Colby, 1987).

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Another characteristic of stress is that our culture may influence stress. When we say culture, it means shared ideas and beliefs or behaviors of a group. So when a group of people collectively believe or do something, it is part of that group's culture.

Now, as we have already discussed that, stress largely depends on our interpretation of an event. Our cultural values and norms may influence those interpretation processes and ultimately influence our stress reactions. So we all know the people in different settings, different cultural groups have different beliefs which may influence stress reactions. For example, one study shows that Japanese and Korean students seem to suffer greater exam stress than British students, which suggests a possible cultural difference in the examination stress. For example, there may be cultural differences between the Japanese and Korean in terms of how much importance they give to an event like an examination. So it seems that examination plays a much more important role in the Japanese and Korean culture as compared to British culture. Another example could be, being gay or lesbian could be highly stressful in a culture where it is not accepted. And it may not be that stressful in some European countries such as Spain, where it is much more open, and people are more accepting. So those cultural aspects may influence how we experience stress.

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Characteristics of stress...Contd.

Stress can have Spillover effect

Stress spillover refers to the process where stress in one domain, such as workplace spill over to create stress in another domain such as family relationships (Grzywacz, Almeida, & McDonald, 2002) such as marital satisfaction.

There can be positive spillover effect also. For example, positive emotions experienced at workplace can lead to positive mood and interactions with family members at home (Greenhaus & Powell, 2006).

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Another characteristic of stress is that stress can have a spillover effect. The spillover effect basically refers to the process where stress in one domain of life, such as workplace spillover and creates stress in another domain such as family relationships. So, in the spillover effect, stress gets transferred from one domain to another domain of life, such as from workplace to family life. So, when people say that they are not able to maintain a work-life balance, they are talking about the spillover effect of the stress where too much stress in the workplace is influencing their family life. So this is a common experience of the spillover effect of stress. The spillover effect can be bidirectional also. So, stress from family life can influence stress in the workplace, and the stress in the workplace can influence your family life.

There can be a positive spillover effect also. For example, the positive emotional experience at a workplace can lead to a positive mood and interaction with your family members at home. So spillover effect can happen for both positive and negative emotions.

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Characteristics of stress...Contd.

Stress Contagion/Stress transfer

It refers to the process where one person's reaction to stress affects the health of a significant other such as spouse's depression affects one's well-being (Saxbe & Repetti, 2010).

In an interesting study by Waters, West, and Mendes (2014) found that mothers' stressful experiences are contagious to their infants and can reciprocally influence each other's physiological reactivity.

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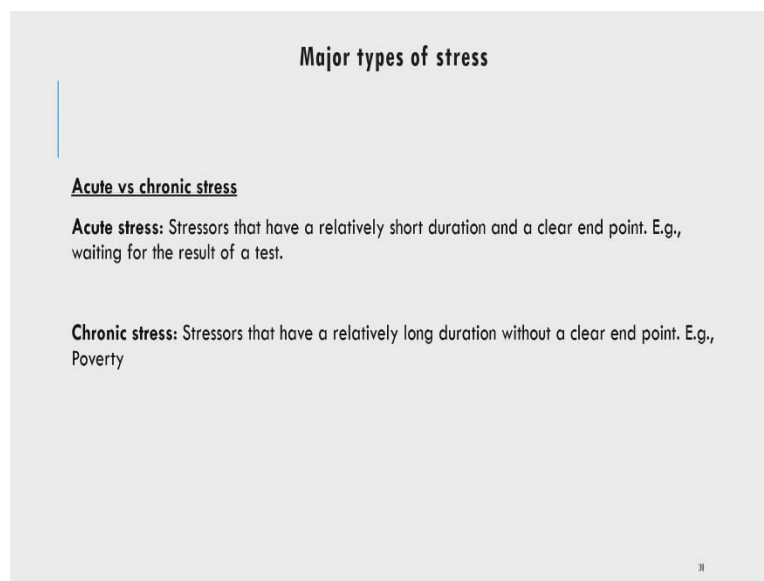
The next characteristic of stress is called stress contagion or stress transfer. Stress contagion or stress transfer refers to the process where one person's reaction to stress affects a significant other's health, such as a spouse. For example, the depression of one spouse may affect the well-being of the other. So the contagion of stress is the transfer of stress from one person to another person, mainly those who are very close to us, whereas stress spillover is a transfer of stress from one domain of life to another domain.

Human beings are very sensitive to emotions. So, our emotional experiences influence people who are around us, particularly close ones. Our emotional experiences can consciously or unconsciously influence other's emotions. This is generally called affect contagion. So emotions are highly contagious and are transferred to people around you. From the evolutionary perspective, it facilitates bonding and coordination between people and hence social life.

So, our emotions are not just personal and private experiences. They are likely to get transferred and influence people around us. For example, an interesting study by Waters, West, and Menders in 2014 showed that mothers' stressful experiences are contagious to their infants and can reciprocally influence each other's physiological reactivity. In the experiment, infants were separated from their mothers. Infants were kept in a separate room and the researcher played with them while mothers were sent to another room for the experimental task. Mothers were divided into three groups. In one group, mothers were asked to perform a stressful positive

evaluation task; it was a positive task but stressful. In another group, mothers were asked to do stressful negative evaluation tasks. So, they were supposed to negatively evaluate some task which was stressful. The third group was a control group where mothers were asked to perform a non-stressful task. So, these three groups of mothers did their tasks and then reunited with their infants. Research showed that infant's physiological reactivity, in terms of heartbeat and other measures, exactly mirrored mother's physiological reactivity. So, even though infants were not at all conscious of what mothers were doing. However, when mothers became stressed after doing the experimental task and met their infants, the infant could unconsciously sense those stress and transferred it to them. Furthermore, results also indicated the highest physiological correlation between the mother and infant was found in the case of mothers who did stressful negative evaluation tasks. So, stress contagion can happen very unconsciously, especially between parents and children.

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So, these are some major characteristics of stress. Now, we will talk about the major type of stress. Stress can be divided into various categories. One category is acute versus chronic stress.

Acute stress is stressors that have a relatively short duration and a clear endpoint. For example, you are waiting for a result of your test or an exam. This is acute stress as it will remain for a short duration and will end once the result is declared. The other category is called chronic stress. Chronic stress is kind of opposite to acute stress. These are a category of stressors that have a

relatably long duration and without any clear endpoint. For example, poverty can be a chronic stressor as it may remain for a long duration, and one may not see a clear endpoint of poverty. Another example could be living with an abusive partner. Chronic stresses are the most dangerous categories of stress primarily because all the negative impacts of stress are mostly associated with chronic stress. For example, most of the adverse impact of stress on health and well-being is primarily associated with chronic stress. We will discuss more about stress and health in the upcoming lectures.

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Social Stressors

Social stressors can be divided into three major categories: Life events, chronic strains, and daily hassles (Carr & Umberson, 2013).

Life events are acute changes that require adjustment within a relatively short time period such as job loss. Unexpected (sudden death of loved one) and off-time (widowed prematurely) life events are more distressing (George, 1999).

Traumatic life events such as sexual assault are extremely stressful and may have long lasting effects.

Chronic stress/strain

Daily hassles: These are minor events that require adjustment throughout the day such as traffic jams.

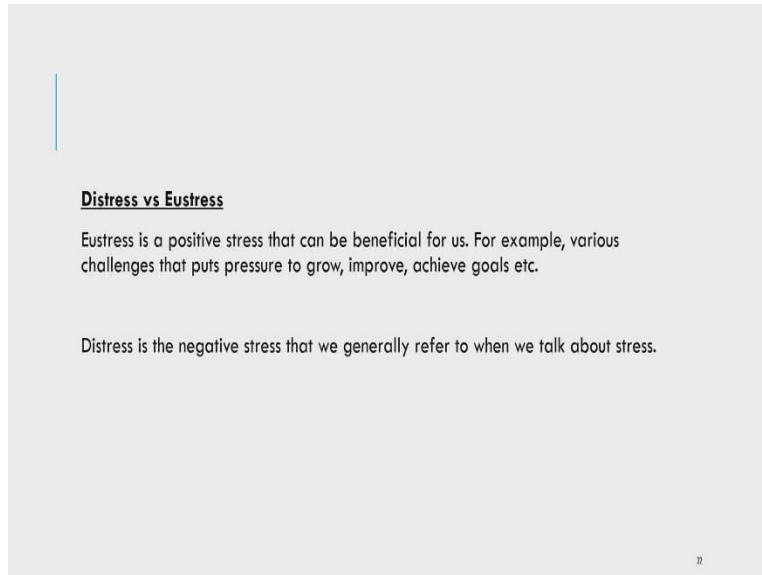
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Another way of categorizing stress is different categories of social stressors. Social stressors can be divided into three categories, i.e., life events, chronic strains, and daily hassles. Life events can be stressful and are mostly acute changes that require adjustment with a relatively short time period. They are more like acute stress but may happen specifically in the context of some life event, such as the loss of a job. They can be very stressful, especially the unexpected and off-time life events are more stressful. For example, the sudden death of a loved one or getting widowed prematurely. These are unexpected events. Some life events are traumatic events such as sexual assault, which are very extremely stressful and may have a long-lasting impact on our mind.

We have already discussed chronic stress. They are for long-duration stressors and without any endpoints.


Daily hassles are generally minor events that require adjustments in our day-to-day life like traffic jams, misplacing things, etc.

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We can also distinguish between distress and eustress. Eustress is considered positive stress. Some stress is positive in the sense that they are beneficial for us; they motivate us and challenges us to grow, improve and achieve goals in our life. So, stress can also motivate us to grow in our life, to achieve goals in our life. So in that sense, many stresses are good and positive. They are called eustress. Distress is used for all the negative aspects of stress. Generally, when you talk about stress, we are typically talking about distress.

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Other sources of stress

Frustrations: It occurs in any situation in which the pursuit of some goal is thwarted such as traffic jams. (Weiten & Lloyd, 2007). Some frustrations such as failures and losses can be very stressful.

Psychologists John Dollard and colleagues (1939) proposed "Frustration-Aggression" hypothesis by suggesting that (a) frustration always produces an aggressive urge and (b) aggression is always the result of prior frustrations.

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Now, there can be many other sources of stress. One of the major sources of stress is called frustrations. Frustrations occur in any situation in which some kind of pursuit of a goal is thwarted or when we are not able to reach a particular goal. Therefore, frustrations may be caused by an obstacle in reaching a goal. For example, getting stuck in a traffic jam during an emergency may be very frustrating and stressful. Other examples can be not getting a promotion even after hard work.

Psychologist John Dollard and his colleagues in 1939 proposed a hypothesis called as "Frustration-Aggression" hypothesis where they proposed that frustration always produces an aggressive urge and aggression is always the result of prior frustrations. So, frustration is most commonly associated with aggression, and frustration leads to aggression.

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Conflicts: It occurs when two or more incompatible motivations compete for expression. (Weiten & Lloyd, 2007).

Kurt Lewin (1935) discussed three types of conflicts-

approach-approach-when one has to choose between two equally desirable but incompatible options. Eg., want to stay healthy and also want to eat unhealthy fatty foods.

Avoidance-avoidance-when one has to choose between two equally undesirable options. E.g., a patient with serious illness has to choose between having a traumatic surgery or long term therapy with unpleasant side effects.

Approach-avoidance-when there are desirable and undesirable factors within a single option. E.g., A person wants to go to the gym but also believes gym membership is unnecessary and extravagant expense.

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Another source of stress is called conflicts. Conflicts in our life also create stressful situations. Conflict occurs when two or more incompatible motivations compete for expression. Kurt Lewin, in 1935, discussed three types of conflicts that we experience in our life. One is called approach - approach conflict. This happens when one has to choose between two equally desirable but incompatible options. So there are two desirable things that we want to do. Both are equally desirable, but they are incompatible with each other. So if you do one, the other is kind of incompatible with that. So that creates a conflict. For example, you want to stay healthy and also want to eat unhealthy foods. So, both are attractive to you, you want both, but if you do both together, they are kind of incompatible with each other, conflicting to each other. So it creates a conflict, and such conflict may cause further stress.

Then there can also be avoidance - avoidance conflict. This happens when one has to choose between two equally undesirable options. So, in the case of approach - approach, there are two equally desirable options that are incompatible with each other; here, there are two equally undesirable options. For example, a patient with a serious illness has to choose between having a traumatic surgery or long-term therapy with unpleasant side-effects. So, one has to choose between two undesirable options.

The third category of conflict is called approach-avoidance conflict. This happens when there is desirable and undesirable factors within a single option. So, you want to do something, there is

an option for doing something, but there is a desirable aspect to it, and there is an undesirable aspect to it. So there is an approach and avoidance aspect in the same option. For example, a person wants to go to the gym but also believes that gym membership is an unnecessary and extravagant expense.

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Life changes: these are any noticeable changes in one's life circumstances that require readjustment.

Holmes and Rahe (1967) developed the social readjustment rating scale (SRRS) to measure life change as a form of stress. This scale included 43 major life events such as death of a spouse, divorce, personal injury, retirement etc.

Interestingly, they also included positive events as a source of stress such as marriage.

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Another category of sources of stress includes life changes. We have already discussed that any changes create new situations and need to adjust, and disruptions and stress are natural. Similarly, there are many life changes take place throughout our life. Holmes and Rahe, in 1967, developed a scale that is a very popular scale called the social readjustment rating scale. This scale measures life changes as a form of stress. It includes 43 major life events which are commonly experienced by most people, such as the death of a spouse, divorce, personal injury, retirement, etc. Interestingly, they also included some positive events such as marriage which can also be stressful as it brings many changes in one's life.

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Pressure: It involves expectations or demands that one behave in a certain way. There can be two types of pressures-the pressure to perform and the pressure to conform (Weiten & Lloyd, 2007).

One is under the pressure to perform when he/she is expected to perform tasks and responsibilities quickly, efficiently and successfully.

Pressure to conform involves pressure to follow others' expectations such as one is expected to follow parents values and rules.

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Then the last category of sources of stress is called pressure. Sometimes, in defining stress, we call stressful experiences are like pressure in our mind. So, what is pressure? Pressure basically involves expectations or demands that one should behave in certain ways. So, whenever there is an expectation or demand on you that you should behave in a certain way, it may create pressure. So this can be stressful sometimes. For example, there can be two types of pressure, one is called the pressure to perform, and another is called the pressure to confirm. We experience pressure to perform when there is an expectation to perform tasks and responsibilities quickly, efficiently, and successfully such as performing or producing results within a deadline.

The pressure to conform, on the other hand, involves pressure to follow others' expectations. Our near and dear ones have much expectation of us, and they tell you to behave in a certain way i.e., following social norms. So, there may be pressure to conform to follow parental values and rules, which you may not like to do, but you have to follow them because of social norms. So, this kind of pressure also creates stress in our life.

So, these were some important concepts related to stress. Notably, we have discussed various characteristics of stress, various types of stress and various sources of stress. So with this, I end today's lecture. Thank you.