

Intro to Psychology Research Paper

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Author Note

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Stress is something that affects everyone in the world at different levels in life. Whether it be due to sports or because of some other underlying personal issue, it remains as a constant reminder that learning how to deal and manage stress is an important skill to learn. This skill, however, is not something that is easily attainable for a lot of individuals. This is due to the type of stress and what it may be doing to already underlying problems a person may be facing that they may have been hiding for a while. Stress affects all parts of the human body, whether it be mentally, physically or chemically. “Stress and strong emotions can present with respiratory symptoms, such as shortness of breath and rapid breathing, as the airway between the nose and the lungs constricts.”(Stress effects on the body, 2018). Although these symptoms don’t necessarily lead to problems such as asthma or panic attacks, individuals with the already underlying symptoms may be more susceptible to them when dealing with an increased level of stress. It is not only the respiratory system that is affected by stress in the human body. The endocrine system is also greatly affected when dealing with stress. “During times of stress, the hypothalamus, a collection of nuclei that connects the brain and the endocrine system, signals the pituitary gland to produce a hormone, which in turn signals the adrenal glands, located above the kidneys, to increase the production of cortisol.”(Stress effects on the body, 2018). The production of cortisol is important for the body in stressful situations, such as dealing with inflammation or managing the immune system of said body. However, constant stress leads to a malfunction in the immune system, leading to more health issues. Some of these issues include diabetes, depression, obesity, fatigue, etc. Stress early on in life can lead to these problems and more as well. Even as far as the gastrointestinal system is affected by constant physical or mental stress on the body. “The gut is also inhabited by millions of bacteria which can influence its

health and the brain's health, which can impact the ability to think and affect emotions.”(Stress effects on the body, 2018). These bacteria can have a huge part in deciding the mood of the individual in general. When stress is added to the mix, this connection in the body becomes greatly affected, leading to other health problems and issues.

The effects are greater when said individual already has underlying or preexisting conditions to add on top of the stress. Not only does stress affect the chemical changes within an individual, it also affects the sexual desire of biologically born men and women. Daily stressors in life can have a lasting impact on men as well as women in regards to this aspect of their lives as well. “Chronic stress, ongoing stress over an extended period of time, can affect testosterone production resulting in a decline in sex drive or libido, and can even cause erectile dysfunction or impotence.”(Stress effects on the body, 2018). When compared with men who lead lives that are significantly less stressful to those constantly stressed out, the production of sperm and their mobility were greatly changed negatively in the latter. That is to say that men who were in constant stressful situations had a lower sex drive, lower production of sperm and even times when trying to fornicate was something they were unable to accomplish. This in turn can lead to men being even more stressed out, as they would feel inadequate and have an even higher chance to develop depression. In women, major stress can change a lot more things within their bodies than just their sex drive. Their menstruation cycles can also be changed by constant stress in their lives. It can cause the duration of said cycles to change in various ways and more painful cramps when going through their period. Stress can also affect pregnancy in women, leading to difficulties and even leading to depression when going through these stages in life. This not only affects the women who are about to deliver their offspring, but also their kids in the womb as well and their development and bond with their mothers. For women experiencing menopause,

stressors outside of menopause can add on to the physical effects that they are already going through. This, in turn, can lead to more anxiety and stress on top of what they already have to go through with all of this.

Depending on the amount of stress an individual receives, it can lead to other issues that develop over time due to the constant stressors that are dealt. For example, post traumatic stress disorder is a disorder that many people are facing today due to a variety of factors. PTSD is due to people going through traumatic experiences that cause them. There are many people who experience this disorder who have also served in the armed forces as well as normal civilians. The reason why many succumb to this fate is due to many reasons that unfortunately overwhelm the individual. There are growing and vast improvements in how people with PTSD are being treated. Treatment includes medication, therapy, as well as prolonged exposure just to name a few. PTSD can lead to even more depression and viceversa and even lead to suicidal thoughts. “An average of 20 veterans die by suicide each day, and veterans account for 14.3 percent of all suicides among U.S. adults”(Pappas, 2018). The staggering numbers speak for themselves when there is a huge amount of people killing themselves daily.

The number of people with suicidal thoughts and tendencies is just as big, if not bigger, than those with PTSD. “Suicide rates rose 33% between 1999 and 2019, with a small decline in 2019. According to the [Centers for Disease Control and Prevention \(CDC\)](#), 47,500 Americans ages 10 or older died by suicide in 2019. Suicide rates vary by race/ethnicity, age, and other factors.”(n.a., 2018). Although the rates of suicide attempts and suicide itself are varied depending on the individual, the causes are centered around stress. However, the reasons are ever changing and just as numerous as the amount of people who have them. Treatment for people going through this also varies as there isn't a one-shoe-fits-all solution. Another thing people tend

to look out for or try to are the warning signs that are associated that may lead to self-harm and suicide. Substance abuse, a significant change in their behavior and looking up ways to commit suicide are big warning signs that people should look out for if ever dealing with someone going through all of this.

Substance abuse may be one of the warning signs, it is also an issue within itself that people have a tough time learning to overcome. One of the biggest substances abused today is alcohol, as it is widely accessible for almost anyone. The major cause is usually stress of some sort for people resorting to alcohol dependency. “The 2017 analysis of the National Epidemiological Survey on Alcohol and Related Conditions (NESARC)[i] revealed that of adults reporting “alcohol dependence” (as defined in the DSM-4), 54% had experienced an anxiety disorder in their lifetime and 34% had experienced a personality disorder in their lifetime.(Position Statement 33: Substance Use Disorders, n.d.) Alcohol is used as a coping mechanism to help people get through tough times, whether it be due to outside factors or internal demons. As a result, those dealing with problems of alcoholic substance abuse tend to have lower empathy levels than those not dealing with the same issue. To add to that, between men and women, there are more men out there who are struggling with alcohol abuse than women. “In general, men have higher rates of alcohol use, including binge drinking.”(NIDA, 2022). Due to this disparity among the amount of people who suffer from alcohol abuse, studies have been focused and aimed at men to understand how to treat the staggering number of cases plaguing the world. By learning and taking as much information as possible, better treatment methods can be used for everybody in order to help those overcome their substance abuse. In one case, different levels of empathy were measured to determine the correlation of alcohol abuse and empathy. “Cases with alcohol dependence showed lower levels of cognitive, affective, and

total empathy as compared to controls. Affective and total empathy were higher in abstinent men.”(Nachane, 2021). Men who were abusing alcohol as a substance generally didn’t have the same levels of empathy as the other group of non- alcoholic-dependent men. This may be a correlation due to alcohol, as it severely affects people in the mind and the body at the same time. In the experiment that takes place within the article, abstinence was also used to measure the levels of affective and total empathy among the group of men with the alcohol abuse issue. Treatment that can help individuals with alcohol abuse can include therapy, medication and support groups, just to name some of them. Family counseling is a form of talk therapy that involves having close relatives into the sessions in order to form bonds and attempt to mend relationships affected by the substance abuse. In behavioral therapy, people learn how to cope with stress and better, more healthier ways than before. A lot of these methods can help an individual, whether it be man or woman, understand and better manage the issue of alcohol abuse within themselves.

What I’ve learned throughout the semester is that stress affects almost everybody in the world. It can lead to more issues later on and it can exacerbate underlying ones. Whether it be the chemical functions of the body, the organs, and the brain, or a factor in developing depression or substance abuse, stress needs to be managed carefully from person to person. Stress is a wide array of problems that can stem and lead to almost any other issue, however, there are ways to seek help and that’s what’s important. Different types of medication and therapy can help according to the situation being dealt with on a case-by-case basis. The type of treatment is important not to only help the person going through their issues and problems, but also to help others by learning more about what works and what doesn’t. The knowledge that comes from the

results of what was used, is being used, and will be used can be an important tool to help treat patients better in the long run and in the future.

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