

# 3.1 Understanding the relationship between Stress And Mental Health



# Understanding Stress

- Stress is a feeling of tension or worry that's a natural response to challenges or threats. It can be physical or emotional.
- Stress is a physical sensation and a feeling of being overwhelmed
- Your mental and physical reactions to a stressor serve a purpose.

# Understanding Stress

## Types of Stress (based on duration)

- Acute Stress
- Episodic Stress
- Chronic Stress

## **Acute Stress (short term, immediate stress)**

- Short-term and temporary stress response to specific situations or demands.
- Typically triggered by immediate stressors
- Involves activation of the body's "fight-or-flight" response
- Can be manageable and may provide a burst of energy and focus to tackle challenges.
- Resolves once the stressor is removed or the situation is resolved.
- Rapid heartbeat, sweating, emotional fluctuations, etc.
- Eg. Nervousness before an exam, preparing for an imp. Client presentation, experiencing a sudden argument at work

## **Episodic Stress (frequent short term stress)**

- A pattern of repeated episodes of acute stress experienced by individuals.
- Common in people who are prone to worry excessively, have a pessimistic outlook, or take on too many responsibilities.
- Often characterized by a sense of constant crisis, dealing with one problem after another.
- Individuals may exhibit symptoms of persistent tension, irritability, anxiety, and physical health issues related to stress.
- Muscle tension, hyper tension, increased irritability & anger, migraines
- Eg. Journalists working on tight deadlines daily, employees juggling multiple projects, students rushing to complete assignments

# Chronic Stress (long term, on-going stress)

- Long-term and persistent stress that persists over an extended period.
- Arises from ongoing life circumstances or chronic stressors such as work pressures, financial problems, relationship issues, or health conditions.
- Can have profound effects on physical, emotional, and mental health if left unmanaged.
- Weight gain, insomnia, panic attacks, chronic headaches, emotional exhaustion.
- Eg. An employee stuck in a chronic workplace with no career growth, struggling with financial debt for years, managing a terminally ill family member

# Eustress & Distress

## ❖ Eustress

- moderate or normal psychological stress that leads to a positive response
- Ex - travel that is stressful but ultimately rewarding
- work that is challenging but fulfilling
- major life changes such as moving house or getting married

## ❖ Distress

- Distress is what many individuals know as “bad” stress. Distress often causes people to feel overwhelmed and anxious
- Ex – financial stress, media overload, bullying, death of a loved one, etc

# Common Workplace Stressors

## ❖ Triggers

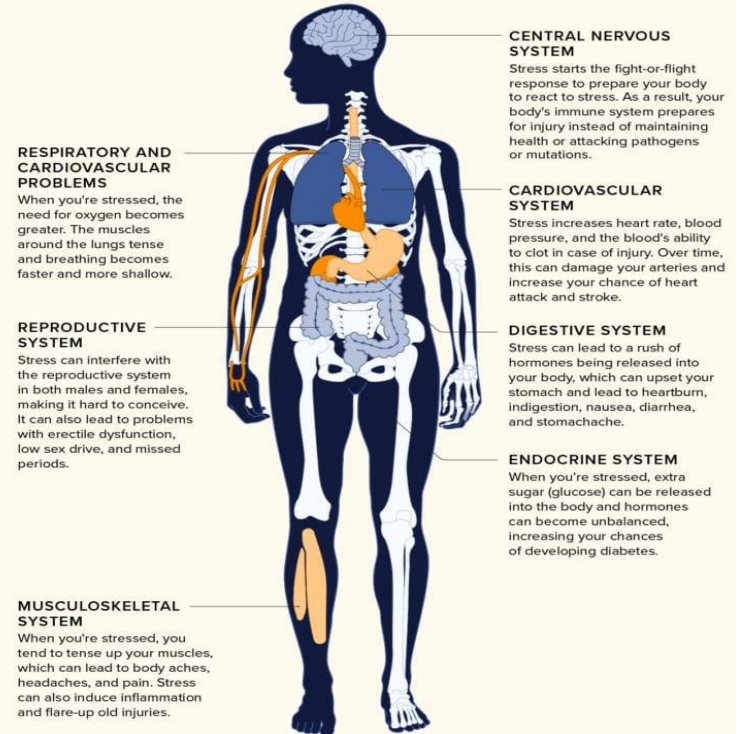
- Workload pressure
- Long working hours & unrealistic deadlines
- Micromanagement & lack of autonomy
- Poor workplace relationships & conflicts
- Job insecurity & career concerns



# Impact of Stress on Mental & Physical Health

- ❖ Cognitive effects: Decision-making, concentration, memory loss
- ❖ Emotional effects: Anxiety, irritability, depression
- ❖ Behavioral effects: Procrastination, withdrawal, unhealthy coping mechanisms
- ❖ Physical symptoms: Headaches, fatigue, insomnia, high blood pressure

## How Stress Affects The Body



# Workplace Burnout

## ❖ What is burnout?

extreme tiredness or mental or physical illness  
caused by working too hard or trying to do too much

## ❖ Signs of burnout:

Emotional exhaustion, detachment, reduced productivity

# Workplace Burnout

## ❖ Types of Burnout:

**Overload burnout:** This happens when you work harder and harder, becoming frantic in your pursuit of success. If you experience this, you may be willing to risk your health and personal life to feel successful.

**Under-challenged burnout:** This happens when you feel underappreciated and bored. Maybe your job doesn't provide learning opportunities or room for professional growth.

**Neglect burnout:** This happens when you feel helpless. If things aren't going right, you may believe you're incompetent or unable to keep up with your responsibilities. Such burnout can be closely connected to imposter syndrome, a psychological pattern in which you doubt your abilities, talents, or accomplishments.

**Habitual burnout:** The most serious phase of burnout, habitual burnout happens when your physical and mental fatigue is chronic. You feel sad and your behavior changes.

# Workplace Burnout

## ❖ Stages of Burnout:

1. **An urgent need to prove yourself** -you want to do well,point of perfectionism for fear of not fulfilling demands.
1. **Working harder.** You feel the need to do everything yourself and complete tasks as soon as possible.
1. **Neglecting your needs.** You neglect your social life and look down on others who pursue one. You begin to make small mistakes.
1. **More interpersonal conflicts.** You have conflicts with co-workers, friends, or your partner. You don't sleep well, have other physical complaints, or become forgetful.
1. **Revision of values.** You see things differently and begin to seem insensitive to others around you. Friends and family become secondary to your goals.

# Workplace Burnout

## ❖ Stages of Burnout:

5. **Denial.** Bitterness and cynicism creep in, and you begin to cut yourself off from others, becoming impatient, intolerant, and angry. Your performance suffers, and you feel physical discomfort.
6. **Withdrawal.** Dealing with others feels like a burden. You get angry if someone criticizes you, and you may feel disoriented or helpless. You may try to self-medicate with alcohol or illegal substances.
7. **Behavioral changes.** Apathy sets in and nothing matters. You avoid additional responsibilities.
8. **Depersonalization.** You lose your sense of identity, seeing yourself only as the vessel through which work and responsibilities are completed. Your life feels meaningless, and you begin to neglect your health.
9. **Feeling empty.** Exhaustion, anxiety, and panic set in.
10. **Despair.** You may have feelings of self-hatred or depression coupled with suicidal thoughts.
11. **Total burnout.** This last phase of mental and emotional collapse requires immediate care.

# Workplace Burnout

## ❖ Stages of Burnout:

5. **Denial.** Bitterness and cynicism creep in, and you begin to cut yourself off from others, becoming impatient, intolerant, and angry. Your performance suffers, and you feel physical discomfort.
6. **Withdrawal.** Dealing with others feels like a burden. You get angry if someone criticizes you, and you may feel disoriented or helpless. You may try to self-medicate with alcohol or illegal substances.
7. **Behavioral changes.** Apathy sets in and nothing matters. You avoid additional responsibilities.
8. **Depersonalization.** You lose your sense of identity, seeing yourself only as the vessel through which work and responsibilities are completed. Your life feels meaningless, and you begin to neglect your health.
9. **Feeling empty.** Exhaustion, anxiety, and panic set in.
10. **Despair.** You may have feelings of self-hatred or depression coupled with suicidal thoughts.
11. **Total burnout.** This last phase of mental and emotional collapse requires immediate care.

# Hans Selye's General Adaptation Syndrome (GAS)

- ❖ GAS explains how the body reacts to prolonged stress in **three stages**:
  1. **Alarm Stage** – Immediate reaction to a stressor.
  2. **Resistance Stage** – Body tries to cope with stress.
  3. **Exhaustion Stage** – If stress persists, the body becomes overwhelmed.
  
- ❖ **Example: Preparing for an Engineering Exam**
  - **Alarm Stage:** The exam date is announced, and you panic because you haven't prepared much.
  - **Resistance Stage:** You begin studying intensely, reducing sleep and social activities to focus.
  - **Exhaustion Stage:** If the stress continues over weeks, you might feel extreme fatigue, lose concentration, or even fall sick before the exam.

# Hans Selye's General Adaptation Syndrome (GAS)

## General Adaptation Syndrome

1

### Alarm Reaction

The initial response to a stressor that typically involves the secretion of epinephrine, norepinephrine, and cortisol among other hormones.

2

### Resistance Development

The body's attempt to repair itself following cessation of the stressor, or the continued rise of hormones in response to threat persistence.

3

### Recovery and Exhaustion

If the threat subsides, the body will begin repairing and adapting to the prior stressors. If the threat does not subside, the body will reach exhaustion when it can no longer continue managing the stressor and is unable to return to normal functioning.



# Transactional Model of Stress & Coping

- ❖ The transactional model of stress and coping is a psychological theory that explains how people react to stressful situations. It was developed by psychologists Richard Lazarus and Susan Folkman in 1984.
- ❖ Steps in the model
  1. **Exposure:** A person is confronted with a challenging event.
  2. **Primary appraisal:** The person assesses the situation's relevance and importance to their needs.
  3. **Secondary appraisal:** The person assesses their own resources for coping with the situation.
  4. **Coping:** The person chooses a coping strategy.
  5. **Outcomes:** The person's health, mood, or behavior may change.

# Transactional Model of Stress & Coping

## ❖ Example 1: Job Interview Anxiety

- **Primary Appraisal:** You are nervous before a job interview and think, *"This interview could change my future. I need to do well."*
- **Secondary Appraisal:** You evaluate if you have the skills and preparation needed. If you feel prepared, stress is lower. If not, stress is high.
- **Coping Strategies:**
  - Problem-focused coping: Practicing mock interviews, researching the company.
  - Emotion-focused coping: Deep breathing, positive self-talk to reduce anxiety.

# Transactional Model of Stress & Coping

## ❖ Example 2: Conflict with a Manager

- **Primary Appraisal:** Your manager criticizes your work. You think, *"Is this a serious issue?"* If you see it as a threat, stress increases.
- **Secondary Appraisal:** You assess whether you can handle the situation. Do you have communication skills to address the issue?
- **Coping Strategies:**
  - Problem-focused coping: Setting a meeting with the manager to clarify expectations.
  - Emotion-focused coping: Talking to a friend, exercising to release frustration.

# Job Demands-Resources (JD-R) Model

❖ High job demands + Low resources = Burnout

**Example:** A customer service executive handling daily complaints without support

**Addressing Specific Workplace Mental Health Challenges:**

**The Impact of Remote Work on Mental Health**

- **Challenges:** Isolation, blurred work-life boundaries, digital fatigue

**Solutions:** Virtual well-being check-ins, flexible work schedules

# Policy Recommendations & Future Trends

## Designing Mental Health Policies for the Future Workplace

### Best Practices for HR:

- Normalizing mental health discussions
- Regular stress assessments
- Ensuring confidentiality in mental health support