

Psychology - lecture notes

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PSYCHOLOGICAL STRESS

What is stress?

Contemporary definitions of stress regard the external environmental stress as stressor, the response to the stressor as eustress or distress, and the concept of stress as something that involves biochemical, physiological, behavioural and psychological changes. (Ogden, 2000)

Acute stress such as an exam or having to give a public talk

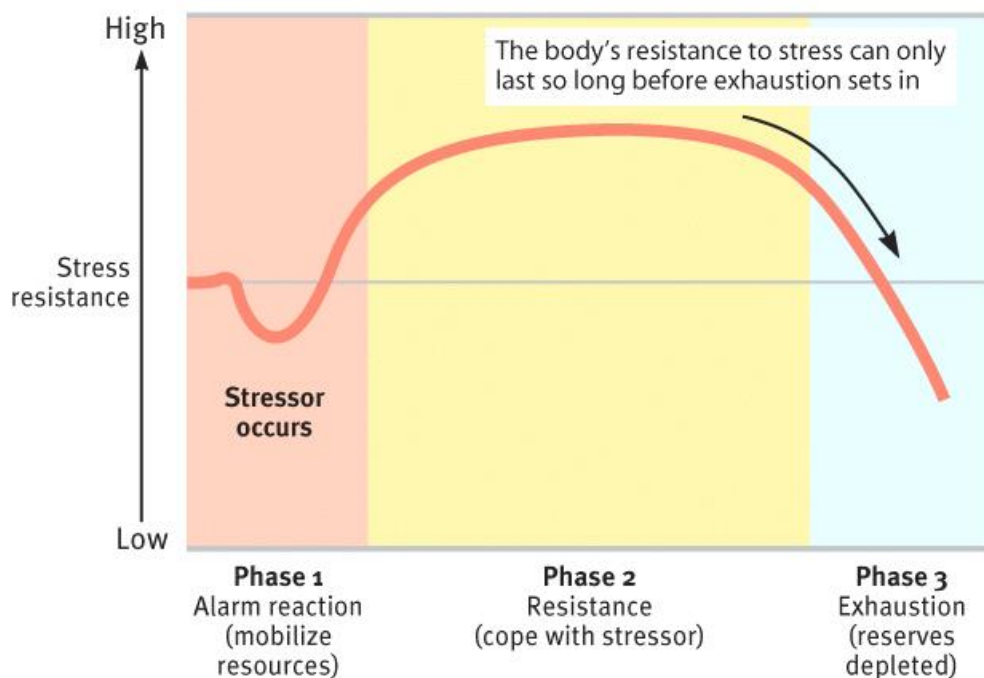
chronic stress such as a job stress and poverty.

Cannon's fight or flight model (1932)

- External threats cause the fight or flight response involving an increased activity rate and increased arousal.
- These psychological changes enable the individual to either **escape** from the source of stress or **fight**.

Prolonged stress can result in medical problems

Selye's general adaptation syndrome 1956



Life events theory 1967

Social Readjustment Rating Scale Holmes, Rahe, 1967

Rahe, Artur, 1978 **Life Change Units - LCU**

Each event is given a score that represents the amount of readjustment a person has to make in life as a result of change.

Stress	Event value
1. Death of a spouse	100
2. Divorce	73
3. Marital separation	65
4. Jail term	63
5. Death of a close family member	63
6. Personal injury or illness	53
7. Marriage	50
8. Fired at work	47
9. Marital reconciliation	45
10. Retirement	45
11. Change in health of family member	44
12. Pregnancy	40
13. Sex difficulties	39
14. Gain of a new family member	39
15. Business readjustments	39

Stress	Event value
16. Change in financial state	38
17. Death of a close friend	37
18. Change to different line of work	36
19. Change in no. of arguments with spouse	35
20. Mortgage over € 50,000	31
21. Foreclosure of mortgage	30
22. Change in responsibilities at work	29
23. Son or daughter leaving home	29
24. Trouble with in-laws	29
25. Outstanding personal achievements	28
26. Wife begins or stops work	26
27. Begin or end school	26
28. Change in living conditions	25
29. Revision of personal habits	24
30. Trouble with boss	23

Stress	Event value
31. Change in work hours or conditions	20
32. Change in residence	20
33. Change in school	20
34. Change in recreation	19
35. Change in religious activities	19
36. Change in social activities	18
37. Loan less than € 50,000	17
38. Change in sleeping habits	16
39. Change in no. of family get- together	15
40. Change in eating habits	15
41. Vacation	13
42. Holidays	12
43. Minor violation of laws	11

Life Change Units - LCU

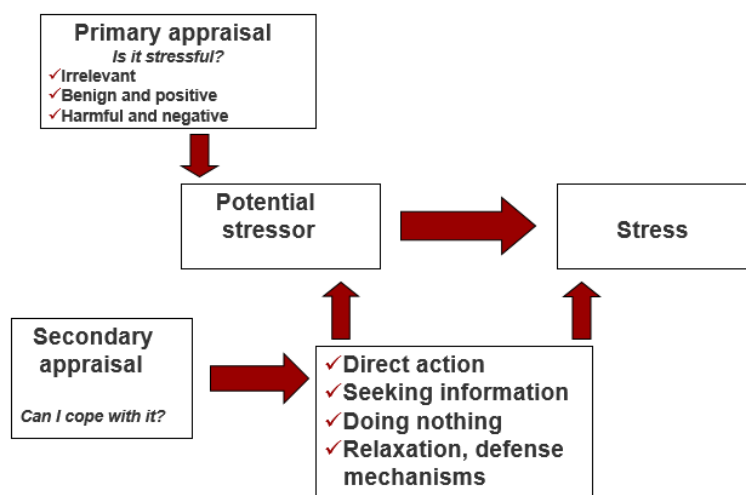
- ▶ People with scores of 300 and higher (within last year) have a high health risk.
- ▶ People scoring between 200 and 299 points (within last year) have about a 50% chance of serious health change within two years.
- ▶ People scoring between 150 and 199 (within last year) have a 33% chance of serious health change.

Moos and Swindle (1990) life events should not be evaluated in isolation but should be integrated into two facets of an individual's life:

- ✓ *ongoing social resources (e.g. social support, financial resources)*
- ✓ *ongoing stressors*

Transactional Model of Stress Lazarus, 1970

The individual no longer passively responds to their external world, but interacts with it.



What events are appraised as stressful?

Salient events Stressors in salient domains of life are more stressful than those in more peripheral domains.

Overload Multitasking seems to result in more stress than chance to focus on fewer tasks at any one time.

Ambiguous events If event is clearly defined then the person can efficiently develop a coping strategy.

Uncontrollable events If stressor can be predicted and controlled then it is usually appraised as less stressful than a more random uncontrollable event. (Swindle, Moos, 1992)

Problem - directed coping

Change stressor or one's relationship to it through direct actions and/or problem - solving activities (behavioural or cognitive).

Fight destroy, remove, or weaken the threat

Flight distance oneself from the threat

Seek options to fight or flight

negotiating, bargaining, compromising

Prevent future stress

act to increase one's resistance or decrease strength of anticipated stress

Emotion - focused coping

Change self through activities that make one feel relaxed but do not change the stressor.

Somatically focused activities

use of antianxiety medication, relaxation, biofeedback

Cognitively focused activities

planned distraction, fantasies, thoughts about oneself

Therapy to adjust conscious or unconscious processes that lead to additional anxiety



Personality and stress

Self-efficacy (Bandura, 1986)

Self-efficacy refers to an individual's feeling of confidence that they can perform a desired action.

Research indicates that self-efficacy may have a role in mediating stress-induced immunosuppression and physiological changes such as blood pressure, heart rate and stress hormones. (Lazarus and Folkman, 1987)

Hardiness (Kobasa et al, 1982)

Personal feelings of control.

A desire to accept challenges.

Commitment.

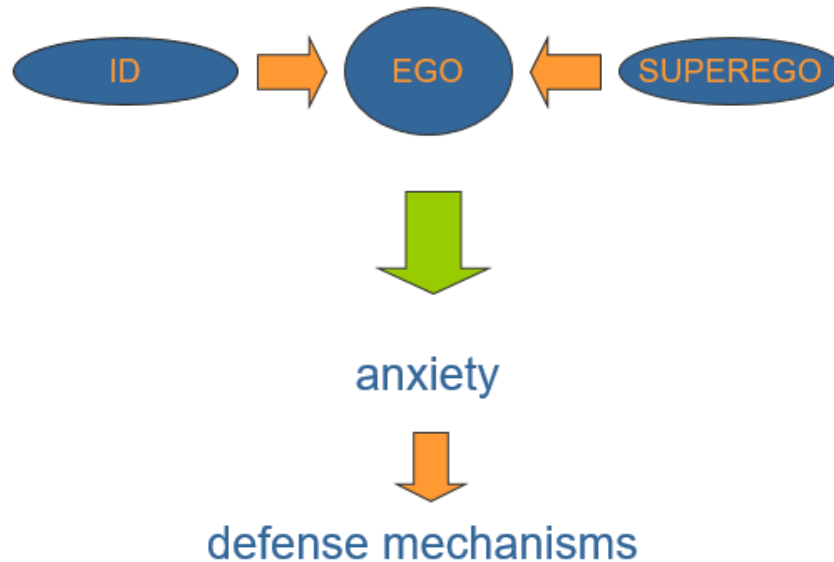
Mastery (Karasek and Theorell, 1990)

Individual's control over their stress response.

The degree of mastery may be related to the stress response.

DEFENSE MECHANISMS

Defense mechanism, in psychoanalysis, any of a variety of unconscious personality reactions which the ego uses to protect the conscious mind from threatening feelings and perceptions.



Sigmund Freud first used *defense* as a psychoanalytic term (1894), but he did not break the notion into categories, viewing it as a singular phenomenon of repression.

Anna Freud, expanded on his theories in the 1930s, distinguishing some of the major defense mechanisms recognized today.

George Vaillant's hierarchy

In G.E. Vaillant's (1977) categorization defenses form a continuum regarding to their psychoanalytical developmental level.

Level I	Psychotic Defenses
Level II	Immature Defenses
Level III	Neurotic Defenses
Level IV	Mature Defenses

Level I **Psychotic Defenses**

Almost always pathological - when they prevent the individual from being able to cope with a real threat and obscure his/her ability to perceive reality.

Level II **Immature Defenses**

Used in childhood and adolescence, but mostly abandoned by adulthood, since they lead to socially unacceptable behaviour and/or prevent the adult from optimal coping with reality.

Level III **Neurotic Defenses**

Common in everyone, but clearly not optimal for coping with reality since they lead to problems in relationships; work; and problems in enjoying life.

Level IV **Mature Defenses**

Used by "healthy" adults, they optimize one's ability to have normal relationships; enjoy work, and to take pleasure in life.

Examples of Psychotic Defenses

Denial - protecting self from unpleasant reality by refusing it.

A disabled person plans to return to former activities without planning a realistic program of rehabilitation.

A woman refuses to acknowledge a pregnancy, despite positive test results.

Persons living near a volcano disregard the dangers involved.

Idealization - dealing with emotional stressors by overestimating the desirable qualities and underestimating the limitations of a desired object.

A lover speaks in glowing terms of the beauty of an average-looking woman he has recently dated.

Devaluation - attributing unrealistic negative qualities to self or others, as a means of punishing the self or reducing the impact of the devaluated item.

The formerly admired professor who gives you a D on your term paper is suddenly criticized as a terrible teacher.

Projection - unacceptable emotions or personal qualities are disowned by attributing them to others.

Saying others hate you when it is you who hates the others.

A student attributes his own anger to the professor, and thereby comes to see himself as a persecuted victim.

Examples of Immature Defenses

Aim inhibition - placing a limitation upon instinctual demands; accepting partial or modified fulfilment of desires.

A person is conscious of sexual desire but if finding it frustrating, "decides" that all that is really wanted in the relationship is companionship.

A student who originally wanted to be a nurse decides to become a nurse's assistant.

Passive aggression - dealing with emotional stressors by indirectly and unassertively expressing aggression toward others.

There is a facade of overt compliance masking covert resistance, resentment, or hostility.

Regression - dealing with emotional stressors by returning to a less mature, anxiety reducing behaviour.

A high school girl who has had a very traumatic day at school curls up in a blanket and rocks herself to sleep.

Examples of Neurotic Defenses

Avoidance - refusing to encounter situations, objects, or activities because of the fear of failures or difficulties. (often seen in phobias)

A worker refuses to confront an employer fearing his or her reactions.

Compensation - encountering failure or frustration in some sphere of activity, one overemphasizes another. The term is also applied to the process of over-correcting for a handicap or limitation.

A physically unattractive adolescent becomes an expert dancer.

A youth with residual muscle damage from poliomyelitis becomes an athlete.

Rationalization - offering a socially acceptable and apparently more or less logical explanation for an act or decision actually produced by unconscious impulses.

Becoming drunk and then after-the-fact saying that it was needed to "take the edge off".

A man buys a new car, having convinced himself that his older car won't make it through the winter.

A woman with a closet full of dresses buys a new one because she doesn't have anything to wear.

Reaction formation - going to the opposite extreme; overcompensation for unacceptable impulses.

A married woman who is disturbed by feeling attracted to another man treats him rudely.

A person with strong antisocial impulses leads a crusade against vice.

A student who hates some group of persons writes an article protesting their unfair treatment by the university.

Examples of Mature Defenses

Altruism - dealing with emotional stressors by dedication to meeting the needs of others.

A person putting away her own problems starts to volunteer.

Humor - the individual deals with emotional conflict or external stressors by emphasizing the amusing or ironic aspects of the conflict or stressors.

Sublimation - dealing with emotional stressors by using the energy in other, usually constructive activities and socially accepted.

A man who is dissatisfied with his sex life but who has not stepped out on his wife becomes very busy repairing his house while his wife is out of town. Thus, he has no time for social activities and sex with other women.

Playing sports to eliminate stress or anger.

A woman is forced to undertake a restrictive diet; she becomes interested in painting and does a number of still life pictures, most of which include fruit.

Suppression - dealing with emotional stressors by deferred dealing with the stressor.

A worker finds that he is letting thoughts about a date that evening interfere with his duties; he decides not to think about plans for the evening until he leaves work.

A student goes on vacation worried that she may be failing; she decides not to spoil her holiday by thinking of school.

A man makes an embarrassing faux pas at a party; he makes an effort to forget all about it.