

3

Stress, Coping, and Health

Chapter Summary

Human stress can be broadly understood as resulting from some event that upsets the equilibrium of the system. Moreover, such perturbations are thought to produce long-term damage and adverse health outcomes. This stress can come from aspects of the situation, from a person's characteristics, and from the interaction of the two.

Job stress has been studied extensively, and most models suggest that it results from the interplay of factors such as a high workload and low autonomy or low reward. Other situational sources of stress include caregiving roles and situations produced by one's position in society. Social stress, created from negative social interactions, appears to be a health liability when viewed within an unsupportive relationship.

Stress has a bidirectional association with sleep, with quality of sleep being impacted by stress and stress being experienced as an outcome of poor sleep. Although the use of digital media devices prior to sleep has been found to contribute to poor sleep quality, specific apps are available to induce a mindfulness state, thus enabling a better quality of sleep. Online social networks are recognized to both increase and decrease stress. While social networking sites such as Facebook, contribute to increased stress and anxiety levels, online social support groups have positive, empowering effects on member's coping strategies and sense of empowerment.

It seems that the sorts of people who are predisposed to stress are those who are prone to hostility and negative affectivity. The interactionist view is that certain people, those high in hostility, will be prone to stress under certain situations, such as negative interpersonal encounters.

While some efforts to define stress have relied on objective factors, most views recognize that the subjective appraisal of the situation is critical. One must determine whether the situation represents a threat, and then whether one has sufficient resources to cope with that threat. Various external resources can contribute to people's ability to cope, and social support is among the most studied of

these. Other strategies that may enhance coping include emotional disclosure, with some evidence that expressing one's thoughts on past events can promote health. Similarly, in enhancing recovery after the event has passed, vigorous physical exercise has been shown to be beneficial.

Essay Topics

1. In what ways does good stress differ from bad stress? (pp. 46–47)
2. What are some of the ways in which social support can influence one's health? (pp. 57–58)
3. What are the different ways in which men and women experience and cope with stress? (pp. 60–61)
4. What are the advantages and disadvantages of problem-focused coping? What about emotion-focused coping? (pp. 56)

Weblinks

<https://www.canada.ca/en/public-health/services/health-promotion.html>

The Public Health Agency of Canada website offers information about stress, heart disease, and stress reduction, as well as links to relevant resources.

http://www.cmha.ca/mental_health/stress/#.VA5dxcKwLYg

A variety of information about stress, as well as a stress self-assessment, can be found on the Canadian Mental Health Association (CMHA) website.

<http://www.stress.org>

The American Institute of Stress has a website devoted to promoting the dangers of stress and ways to cope. The site provides information about stress, guidelines for coping with stress, and links to other websites.

<http://star-society.org>

The Stress and Anxiety Research Society publishes the journal *Anxiety, Stress, and Coping*. The website provides access to journals, newsletters, and other stress research websites.

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eYG0ZuTv5rs>

The documentary *Stress, Portrait of a Killer* examines what scientific findings in the field and in the lab have revealed about stress and its impact on our bodies.

Glossary

Appraisal support Helping someone identify a stressor and potential coping options.

Avoidant coping Ignoring or trying to ignore a problem and its resulting consequences and emotions.

Buffering hypothesis The notion that social support leads to better health outcomes by buffering or protecting the individual from the negative effects of stress.

Cognitive behavioural therapy (CBT) A structured psychological intervention of short duration that involves the identification and modification of maladaptive cognitive patterns and behaviours that contribute to a patient's psychological distress.

Distress A negative form of stress in which demands outweigh resources, which can lead to negative health outcomes.

Emotional support Providing encouragement and empathy.

Emotion-focused coping A type of coping in which one addresses and regulates the negative emotions caused by stressful events.

Eustress A positive form of stress when situations do not overwhelm resources, which can lead to mastery and a sense of meaning.

General Adaptation Syndrome Selye's term for the general response of the body to all threats; also with three stages; alarm, resistance and exhaustion. It describes chronic stress.

Informational support Providing valuable information relevant to addressing a stressful situation.

Instrumental support Providing tangible goods and services.

Job stress Generally thought to be not so much a function of a particular position, but instead having job demands without sufficient authority, autonomy, or rewards.

Main effects model An approach to stress and health positing that social support is generally beneficial to well-being, whether we are carefree or stress-ridden.

Primary appraisal A determination of whether a situation presents a threat, and the magnitude of that threat.

Problem-focused coping A type of coping in which one takes specific actions to address the demands of the stressful situation.

Rumination Dwelling on the events that caused acute stress so that the stress becomes chronic.

Secondary appraisal A determination of whether one has sufficient resources to cope with the threat. If resources are sufficient, then the situation can be viewed as a challenge rather than a threat, and it will be less damaging to the system.

Social support A social network in which others care about one's well-being and provide help and assistance.

Tend-and-befriend The hypothesis put forth by Taylor and colleagues suggesting that women's stress response is marked by efforts at social bonding and caring for offspring.