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STRESS MANAGEMENT: AN IMPORTANT LIFE SKILL

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Naushad M. Mujawar

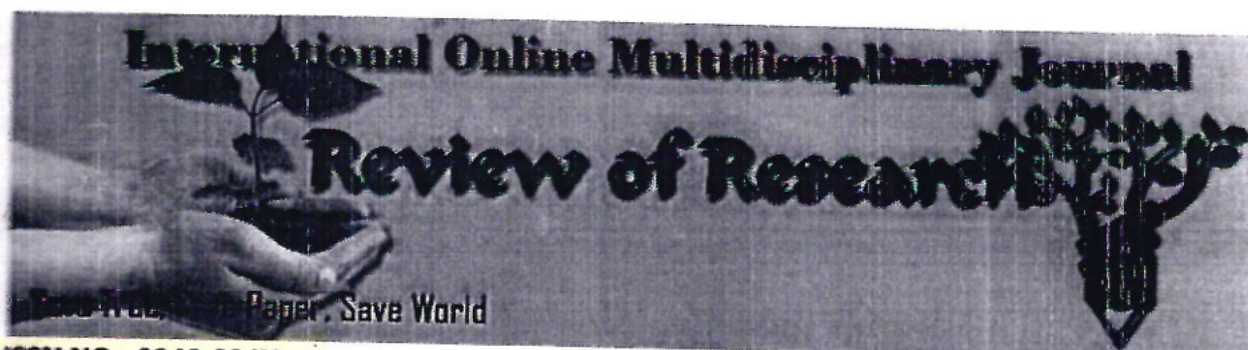
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STRESS MANAGEMENT: AN IMPORTANT LIFE SKILL

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ABSTRACT—

"It is how people respond to stress that determines whether they will profit from misfortune or be miserable." — Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi

"It is not the stress that kills us; it is our reaction to it." —Hans Selye.
In the light of the above statements, the ordinary prudent man may not dare to deny that



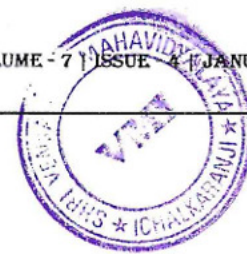
nobody in the world is totally and always stress-free and also that all types of stress are not bad and by skillfully managing even the horrible effects of negative stress can be eliminated.

KEYWORDS : Stress Management , Life Skill , people struggle.

INTRODUCTION :

In our daily life, frequently we face stressful situations. Stress is an inevitable part of everyone's life. Today stress is quite common for all of us. Today the term stress has become a part of everyday life. We keep oscillating between 'very happy' and 'very sad' moments in life. Everyday, people struggle with many stressors; some are minor, some are major and some are **positive** and some are **negative**. The positive stress (called 'eustress') is essential for our performance and success as it mobilizes our energy, however negative stress (called 'distress') is troublesome and sometimes life-taking. Prolonged and poorly managed stress can result in negative physical, mental, and cognitive outcomes for children and youth. Experiencing high levels of stress or chronic stress can undermine physical health, for example, by increasing the likelihood of a weakened immune system, heart disease, obesity and diabetes, cancer, anxiety, depression, poor memory and language skills and lower academic achievement.

Stress is unavoidable and can occur in all facets of life. At some level, stress can be seen as a natural part of development and of adaptation to a changing environment. Stress is a mismatch between demands and resources. Stress is mental i.e. is in your mind. Events do not cause stress, but how you react to them does. Stress can be harmful. It hurts when it becomes a way of life. Some people react to stress by getting sick. The accumulated effects of long-term stress have been linked to heart disease, ulcers and cancer. Around 75% of diseases are stress related. Stressful people become disease prone. In the present era of changed life style, fast growth, intense competition, career-consciousness, ever-increasing inflation etc. have been constantly increasing the stress level of people. Coming centuries are going to have tremendous psychological problems. However, now people have become conscious of stress and its effects and developing their 'stress management' skills.



2: STRESS MANAGEMENT STAGES

The appropriate stress management includes the following stages.

STAGE-I: UNDERSTANDING THE 'STRESS'

Some people are ignorant about the fact that they have been living under stress, while some others misunderstand mere fear and anxiety to be stress. It is therefore imperative to have proper understanding of what is 'stress' and what it is not.

Stress results from the tension between an individual's reaction to difficulties or challenges and his or her ability to handle and resolve the stressful situation.

Hans Selye defined stress as, "the non-specific response of the body to any demands made upon it."

According to **Daniel and George**, "stress is taken to mean a fairly predictable arousal of psycho-physiological systems which, if prolonged, can fatigue or damage the system to the point of malfunction and disease."

Luthans defined stress as "as an adaptive response to an external situation that results in physical, psychological, and/or behavioural deviations for organizational participants."

Stress occurs when pressures are greater than resources (Such as money, time etc.). It can be expressed symbolically as follows:

$$\text{Stress} = \text{Pressures} > \text{Resources} \quad \text{OR} \quad (S = P > R)$$

This resource gap creates stress. For example: Suppose a father needs 5 lakh rupees for his daughter's marriage, but he has just 2 lakh rupees with him. The date of marriage is approaching near and near and he could not make any arrangement for additional money. This resource gap of Rs. 3 lakh brings stress to him.

Types of Stress

The stress can manifest itself in two ways i.e. positive and negative.

Eustress (i.e. Positive Stress)

Stress is considered to be positive when the situation offers an opportunity for one to gain something and this is referred to as 'eustress.' Eustress is very often considered as a motivator since in its absence the individual lacks 'energy' and 'positive mind-set' to achieve peak performance. **Selye** (1980) tells that, "Complete freedom from stress is death."

Prefix 'eu' means 'good' in Greek and 'Sukha' or 'Ananda' in Sanskrit. The examples of eustress are birth of a child in family, foreign trip, or our brother /son becomes IAS officer. These stressors are essential for our living. Absence of eustress is nothing but a 'killer instinct.'

Distress (i.e. Negative Stress)

Prefix 'dis' means 'Dukha' or 'Klesha' in Sanskrit. Death of the nearest and dearest person in accident, failure in examination, loss in business, the lost job, transfer at inconvenient place etc. are some of the examples of distress. The negative stress is the root cause of all problems. The stress is considered negative when it is associated with heart-disease, alcoholism, drug abuse, marital breakdowns, absenteeism, child abuse and a host of other social, physical and emotional problems.

Eustress and Performance

There is a close association between eustress and our performance. As the eustress level increases, your body collects momentum, mobilizes energy and you draw out the 'best' hidden in yourself and show the best or peak performance. Here, you can understand how the boys and girls from ordinary families win in Olympic Games and bring laurel to their motherland.



However, when the eustress level increases beyond the tolerance level that your body warrants, it results into distress, hampers your performance and destroys your health. The following picture exhibits this fact.



Here, it is important to skillfully manage the distress and keep it within tolerance zone and use the eustress as energy generator.

Facts about stress

The following are the well-known and eye-opener facts about the stress and its effects.

- (1) Crisp, Gecanan and D'Souza reported that nearly 26 % people complained that they had sadness, anxious, tired and lacking sexual energy in the year before heart attack. (Psychiatrist's Report)
- (2) Working women with the children below 13 years are the most sufferers. Women do all their household jobs with extra love and affection.
- (3) There are many divorces of people working in Call Centres. Because when the Husband comes to home from bank or college, he smiles and says to his wife: 'Hi' and the wife says: 'Bye' and goes to her work at Call Centre. There is no time to have dialogue. (A Recent Survey Report)
- (4) Bank employees are highly stressed people)

(5) Cost of stress

Following are the examples of the loss occurred due to stress.

- USA: Business loss of \$ 300 bn p.a.
- UK: 6000 firms paid damages 80000 pds
- Canada: 25% of employees suffer quite a lot of stress
- India: 50% of call centre employees end up quitting due to stress
- Japan: 75% of employees feel strong worry, anxiety or stress at work or in daily life

(6) Stress Scores According To Their Magnitudes

Rank	Jobs	Stress Score
1	US President	176.6
2	Senior Executives	108.6
16	Advertising Account Executives	74.6
17	Real Estate Agent	73.1
20	Stock Broker	71.7
31	Lawyer	64.3
35	Insurance Agent	63.3
42	Advertising Salesperson	59.9
50	College Professor	54.2
60	School Principal	51.7
103	Market Research Analyst	42.1
104	Personnel Recruiter	41.8
119	Economists	38.7

149	Retail Salesperson	34.9
173	Accountants	31.1

Source: Adapted from the Wall Street Journal, 1997. Dow Jones and Company Inc.

(7) Major Life Events and Stress Value

Sr. No.	Life event	Stress value
1	Death of spouse	100
2	Divorce	73
3	Marital status	65
4	Jail term	63
5	Death of close family member	63
6	Injury/ illness	53
7	Marriage	50
8	Being fired at work	47
9	Marital reconciliation	45
10	Retirement	45
11	Change in health of family member	44
12	Pregnancy	40
13	Concerns for not having children	40
14	Sex difficulties	39
15	Gain of new family member	39
16	Change in financial status	38
17	Business readjustment	39
18	Son or daughter leaving home	29
19	Change in circle of friends	18
20	Constant travel	16
21	Arguments with others	10

Source: Holmes, T.H., and Rahe, R.H., "The Social Readjustment : Rating Scale", Journal of Psychosomatic Research, 1967, 213-218.

(8) Who is most vulnerable to stress?

According to Thoresen, C.E., & Eagleston, the children and youth who have one or more of the following characteristics may be particularly vulnerable to stress.

- Lack of economic resources
- A tendency to blame negative events on themselves
- Lack sufficient amounts of sleep, food, nutrition, or exercise
- Prior history of psychological or behavioral disorder (such as attachment-related problems or anxiety), or a low tolerance for stress
- Lack of social support (from peers or parents)
- Multiple co-occurring stressors; for example, living in a family environment with high conflict and in a neighborhood with high crime,
- Residence in a socially isolated neighborhood

Further, biological or genetic factors can increase one's vulnerability to stress, as can social and environmental factors.

STAGE-II: ANALYZING THE 'STRESS' (STRESSORS AND EFFECTS)

The second important stage in stress management is to analyzing the stress i.e. understanding the causes (stressors) and the effects of stress.

TYPES OF STRESSORS

There are following two types of stress.

1. External Stressors

These are created by the surrounding situations/ environment. Some of the examples of external stressors are as follows.

Major Life Events: Such as birth, death, lost job, change in marital status, promotion, sudden change

Physical Environment: Such as noise, excessive heat

Financial Problems: Such as loss in business, lost job, urgent need of money, hospitalization expenditure

Daily Hassles: Such as commuting, mechanical breakdowns, misplaced keys, traffic-jam, parking problems

2. Internal Stressors

These are created by ourselves. They are as follows.

Negative Self Talk (Monologue/ Internal Dialogue): i.e Pessimistic thinking, Self criticism. For example one thinks that my colour is black, my eyes are not beautiful, my hairs are not curly or lengthy, and my height is very short. However you need not worry—because Lalbahadur Shastriji was very short, but became Prime Minister of India, Barak Hussain Obama is black but he s became President of America twice, Abraham Lincon was short and not good looking but graced as President of America. Aesop was very ugly but he is known for world famous moral stories. Remember the destructive self-talk erodes self-respect.

Mind Traps: Such as rigid thinking, all or not at all thinking, unrealistic expectations, thinking that I am taking the whole world with me, thinking that only I am working and others are not working, carrying on with the problem.

There may not be a problem in reality, but it may turn out as a problem. Generally we buy problems. Unnecessary worries, unnecessary thoughts we may get unknowingly indulged in. This increases distress. Do not preserve the past. Past is lost. Leave the past.

Over Thinking: Our mind is a thoughts factory. All it does manufacture thoughts and more thoughts, hundreds of them every thirty minutes, round the clock. This is a fact. We have to realize that it can manufacture good thoughts or lousy (i.e. stressful) thoughts. Nearly 30,000 to 60,000 thoughts per day come to a human mind.

Personality Traits: Over curious or inquisitive people borrow stress, discontent, 'I-can-do-it-right-myself' fallacy.

Perfectionists: The passion of being first and/or the best in whatever you do may put your under stress.

Workaholics: Work manic, over-work etc.

Factors Influencing Work Stress: Working conditions, overwork, less work, uncertainty, conflict (i.e conflicting moral values), relations at work (i.e . spoiled relations bring stress;---- Fighting is not good or bad but the way people fight can have positive or negative results), change of work patterns (Contractual jobs in particular), additional responsibility (As you go up to the higher posts, your stress increases)

SYMPTOMS OF STRESS

Commonly reported symptoms of stress are psychological breakdown, emotional turmoil, anger irritability, depression, hypertension, anxiety, stroke and ulcers, heart ailments and heart attacks and of course interrupted sleep. The symptoms of stress may be categorized as follows.

(A) Physical Symptoms: Sleep pattern changes (You toss in bed here and there for one or two hours before you could sleep), fatigue, digestion changes, loss of sexual drive, headache, aches and pains, infection,

indigestion, dizziness, fainting, sweating & trembling, tingling hands & feet, breathlessness, palpitations, missed heartbeats etc.

(B) Mental Symptoms: Lack of concentration, memory lapses, difficulty in making decisions, confusion, disorientation and panic attacks etc.

(C) Behavioral Symptoms: Appetite changes (i.e. too much or too little eating), eating disorders (i.e. anorexia), increased intake of alcohol and other things, increased smoking, restlessness, fidgeting and nail biting etc.

(D) Emotional Symptoms: Bouts of depression (**Important symptoms of depression:** Sad thoughts, increased thought of drinking and/or using drugs, Insomnia, suicidal thoughts or actions, sleeping more than usual, over eating or not eating, feelings of boredom or irritability, losing interest in family life, hobbies, career, low energy levels, isolating), impatience, fits of rage, tearfulness, deterioration of personal hygiene and appearance etc.

STRESS RELATED ILLNESSES

Stress is not the same as ill-health, but has been related to such illnesses as: Asthma, immune system disease, cardiovascular disease, diabetes, digestive disorders, ulcers, depression, skin complaints and migraines and pre-menstrual syndrome etc.

STAGE-III: COPING WITH THE 'STRESS'

The experts have suggested the following stress relieving tips for an individual, among others.

(1) Yoga : Yoga is useful for relieving mental stress. Breathing exercise (deep breathing or *Pranayam*) For example: Count 1 to 6 while inhaling, hold your breath and count 1 to 4 and exhale counting 1 to 6. Take enough training of yoga. India has patent on yoga. Yoga business has gone beyond 125 crore per annum. Practice the following Yoga Positions everyday.

Vajrasan: Remember, Japanese people take food in that position. It is similar like *Quida* in *Namaz*. It is a fact that in Islamic countries mentally challenged people are very less compared to the whole world.

Paschimottasan: It is another useful yoga position. Our body becomes flexible. Body stretch and shakes reduce stress.

Meditation i.e. Concentration. It is nothing but '*living in present, forgetting past and not worrying about future.*' It is an objectless state. It is making mind completely free from external things. Practice it and slowly you will pick up. Do not forget --practice maketh man perfect.

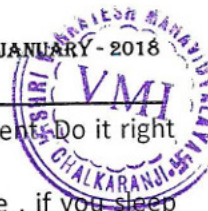
(2) Positive Attitude: i.e. the specific way of thinking. Always see good aspects. See bright side of the thing. Never see the negative side. Bernard Shaw once said: Two dogs are in my head: Good dog and the bad dog. Which will win? The dog to whom I provide what kind of thoughts.---Positive (Good dog) or Negative (Bad dog) Remember, a positive thinker goes ahead with 'efforts and results', and not by 'success and failure.' Convert the problems into opportunity. Change the direction of your life.

(3) Change your mindset: When you commit mistakes, learn from them, instead of getting angry. Accept what you can't change but change what you can't accept.

(4) Get adjusted with people around you: Remember that you can't change others as easily as you can change yourself. Do not catch people (employees/ children) doing wrong things. It will make you angry. Catch them doing right thing.

(5) Time Management: Your life starts with the time management. Time wasted is life wasted. Time is a perishable commodity. Understand the value of 'time' and manage it properly. Following are some tips for Time Management

- Prioritize / Set priorities for your work (list out coolheaded as to what is crowding your mind. Calculate mentally and set the priorities for your work)
- Don't keep things pending or do not postpone them. Generally, we do not file Income Tax return in time, or pay the light bill or telephone bills.



- There are all ordinary/ routine works, no work, activity is urgent. But we make them urgent. Do it right now.

(6) Have Enough Sleep: Take enough sleep. Do not oversleep. Because you don't have time, if you sleep more than six hours like a patient, old person or like just born child.

(7) Empty Your Mind Every Night: Do not store the things in your mind. That would hurt you later. Throw all irritations, worries and guilt into a Mental Waste Box before going to bed. Never go to bed with an argument unsettled. *Don't forget that ten poor people can snore under one blanket while a King may have sleepless nights in his palace.*

(8) Never Loose Faith in Yourself: Have unshaken faith in your skills and capacities. Remember Mr. Nick Vujicic, He born totally limbless in Australia. He has no legs, no hands, only head and trunk. There are only two small fingers to his one-foot place. However at the age of 13 he became the biggest motivational speaker. He has written a book entitled "No arms, no legs, no worries"

(9) Interpersonal Relations: We all have learnt how to drive, how to swim, but not learnt how to behave with other people. Develop and maintain good relations with people. Have friends. Following are some tips to improve interpersonal relations.

Smile (Smile increases your face value. Don't think that, Let him smile first and then I will smile). Give up negative attitude. Some people have extreme negativity. No 'ego', Learn to say 'Thanks', Stay connected with people, Meet people, Shed anger (Do not become 'a little pot ---soon hot.' Be friendly with everybody. ... Never hurt anybody)

(10) Detoxify your body: It is a specific treatment designed to help the body eliminate stored toxins and strengthen the organs. Cleansing your body from toxins is a great way to keep your systems "clean" and running smoothly. The results are improved immune system, clearer skin complexion, better sleep, curing of acne, constipation, disappearance of unpleasant body odour, just to name a few

(11) Food and Exercise: Read the famous book "Hundred ways to live hundred years"

- **Take King's breakfast** (Because you are breaking your fast of almost 10 to 12 hours)
- **Take Queen's lunch**—slightly lower than breakfast
- In the night, take **Beggar's dinner**—very low/ limited food. We are just doing it reverse.
- Do not remove green salad or raw food from recipe.

(11) Have a Change: You must structure your work, your life. Give some break to your work and listen to music. Change is required for everybody. But people cannot pursue their interests due to their hectic schedule. Play games; watch T.V.programs, Listen to music. Do Humour.

(12) Laugh: Hurry, curry and worry are unfavourable factors for heart. But laughter kills stress. Laughter is nature's greatest tonic. Avoid the company of the people who never laugh. How to laugh? Read funny books. See funny films. Meet funny people. Hear good jokes. These may produce a belly laugh and your stress will run away. Have tummy-aching laugh.

Now people are laughing artificially. They are forming Laughter's Club. Develop sense of humour in yourself. If not, at least listen to jokes with interest.

(13) Other Tips:

- Do not watch T.V. while eating.
- Live in good ventilated environment.
- Learn to delegate your work to wife and children. They are intelligent than you, but they are not given scope. Because you do not trust them. So trust in other's capabilities and delegate your work to them.
- Be Honest and Contented
- Family Relations: Family relations are not artificial. These are permanent. Enjoy your family life fully.
- Develop good interpersonal relations: We all have learnt how to drive, how to swim, but not learnt how to behave with other people.

Remember, be careful with yourself. Life will be less stressful and more enjoyable. Learn to enjoy your life and relationships as a clean and sober person.

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