The anxious or threatening feeling resulting from our appraisal of a situation and our reaction to demands placed upon us. Whether people experience stress depends on how they perceive potential opportunities and threats and how they perceive their capabilities to deal with them.

Stressor

- Any stimulus appraised by the individual as threatening or capable of causing harm or loss.
- Stressor is a stress-producing event or situation.
- Stressor may be events, thoughts, or demands.
- Anything that forces us to adjust can be a stressor.
What is a stressor for one person may not be a stressor for another, other person may be enjoy it. Stressors are usually thought as negative, but not necessarily always like that. In some cases, “positive” events are stressful as well. Regardless of whether an event is good or bad, if it requires our coping skills and adaptive responses, the end result is stress.

**Distress**
- Negative stress which stems from acute anxiety or pressure and can take a harsh toll on the mind and body.

**Eustress**
- Positive stress resulting from strivings and challenges.

Certain amount of stress is needed to motivate human-beings. Stress is an essential part of life that goes along with our effort to work toward goals. We have to learn to cope with stress so that it doesn’t overwhelm our lives, but on the other hand it can motivate us to try harder.
Major life changes are important causes of stress. The faster or more dramatic the change, the greater the strain. The more major life changes a person is dealing with at any one time, the more stress the person will feel.

**Stressor 1: Major Life Changes**

- Marriage, serious illness, moving, death in the family, new jobs are all examples of major life changes.
- Holmes and Rahe (1967) created a scale to measure the effects of 43 common events, ranging from the death of a spouse to going on vacation, the results were formed into the SRRS (Social Readjustment Rating Scale).
Stressor 2: Daily Hassles and Demands
- We experience stress not only from major-dramatic events / changes, but also from our somewhat routine daily-minor hassles.
- It includes:
  - Environmental stressors
  - Family and relationship stressors
  - Work stressors
  - Social stressors

Not all stress is caused by external pressures and demands.
- Stress can also be self-generated.
- Examples of internal causes of stress:
  - Uncertainty or worries
  - Pessimistic attitude
  - Self-criticism
  - Unrealistic expectations or beliefs
  - Perfectionism; Low self-esteem
  - Excessive or unexpressed anger; Lack of assertiveness

Stressor 3: Self-generated Stressors

Some factors that may influence stress level:
1. Perception of the stressor & one's coping resources
2. Gender
3. Individual patterns of behaviour/ personality
4. Environmental factors
5. Social support & interpersonal relationship
6. Other demands / expectations
1. Perception and stress

Link individuals’ perceptions of stressors, coping methods, & psychological/physical health

- **Appraisals** - involving the cognitive functions
- **Attribution** - Roesch and Weiner [1989] found that individuals who explained the causes of their illness as internal, unstable, and controllable used active coping methods and were psychologically healthier.
- **Self-Efficacy** - stress reactions are primarily a function of low self-efficacy to exert control over a stressful situation

Perceptions (individual perceptions towards stressors, Impact & coping ability)

- Type of stressor (i.e. size; seriousness?)
- Predictability of stressor (expected vs. unexpected)
- Duration (temporary vs longterm)
- Source of stressor (internal vs external; psychosocial vs. bioecological vs personality)
- Changes that might occur following stressor (positive versus negative)
- Ability to cope (self & family – includes coping resources)

Stress Intensity: Eight factors

1. Predictability of stressor
2. Duration of stressor
3. Intensity of stressor
4. Physiology
5. Motivation
6. Competence
7. Social Support
8. Cognitive Appraisal
People often have little control over the top three factors (beyond one’s control): People with an external locus of control focus on these factors (1–3). Others with an internal locus of control will focus on the factors that they can effect (4–8).

One of the best ways to prepare for stress is to be in good physiological shape.

Exercise program, a healthy diet, a meditation or prayer practice, & a sleep schedule helps to prepare people to “face” stressors.

Motivation is important (focus on what you can do & determine to do it, better deal with stress).

Skills = well informed; > more effective at problem–focused coping (being resourceful, knowing what, how, when, where)

Social support is necessary for those times when you need a shoulder to cry on or when there is nothing else that can be done.

2. Gender

- Oxytocin, a hormone that promotes both maternal and social behavior & enhances relaxation, is the key factor behind the gender difference.
- Additional female hormones are released & these have calming effects on females.
- Oxytoxin induced women to tend children & seek out other women to talk to or ventilate during stressful conditions (“tend & befriend concept” – Taylor et al., 2000)
- Having female friends is an additional “coping resource” for women.
Estrogen—more are released in men; increase stress levels
- Men also secrete oxytocin when under stress, but they produce it in lesser amounts than women do, and its effects are inhibited by male hormones such as testosterone
- Consequently, men tend to become more stressed than women and have shorter lifespan?

Gender differences in Social Support
- Women provide more support than they receive
- Emotional support from wives is a protective factor for married men
- Employment enhances social support with increased friend network
- Men have more instrumental, women more emotional support from friends

Gender & Family roles
- Women’s roles are more complex
- Married men have fewer problems than married women, employment plays a role
- Married women with children & single parents show higher depression; may relate to family care responsibilities—"The Multiple Roles Effect"
- Women have fewer problems when employed (must consider all related factors i.e. being "resourceful")
Gender roles socialization
- Boys/men don’t cry?
- Multiple roles handling since childhood amongst girls
- People are more sympathetic towards women; > support system?

3. Individual patterns of behaviour & personality
- Personality = A pattern of deeply embedded & broadly exhibited cognitive, affective, & overt behavioral traits that persist over time & across situation
- Personality = a collection of thoughts, attitudes, values, beliefs, perceptions, and behaviours that define how we see ourselves & our environment (who we are as human-beings)

- Personality is the key factor which is decisive to determine the nature of the stress:
  - Is it stressful?
  - How stressful?
- Personality includes:
  - Cognition
  - Emotion
  - Behavioral disposition
  - Overall pattern of personality
Personality = The sum of attributes, abilities, attitudes, & values that an individual believes to be a description of who she or he is.

Selected factors in understanding the interactions between personality & stress:
- Self-perception
- Emotional Quotient
- Personality types
- Anxious-Reactive
- Perception
- Hardiness / Resilience

1. Self-perception
   - The way one perceives oneself = SELF – CONCEPT
   - The image one hold of oneself; based on input from family, friends & significant others starting from young age
Self-concept

- How we think of ourselves
- Constructed from beliefs of how we actually are, what we want to be and what we ought to be.
- Evolves through personal observation & comparisons, & by accepting & believing what other tell us about ourselves.
- Earlier life experiences can boost or diminish the development of healthy self concept

Erikson stages of Psycho-social Development (1986, 1997)

- Completing the stages is needed to ensure healthy self concept
- Each stage is built on the previous stage
- Many adults are stuck in stages 5, 6, 7 (ages 12 – 40), never reaches 9
  - Maybe due to incompletion of earlier stages
  - The concept of "adult children" – Bradshaw (1992)
- People of any age can enhance their self-concept
- The individual is the only person who can increase the positive feelings of him/her self

Erikson Stages of Development & self concept characteristics

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>STAGE</th>
<th>TASKS</th>
<th>Self-Concept Characteristics</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Basic trust vs. Mistrust</td>
<td>Age 1</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Positive learning result</td>
<td>Trust, comfort, hope.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Lack of learning results</td>
<td>Mistrust, discomfort.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Autonomy vs. Shame &amp; Doubt</td>
<td>Ages 2 – 3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Positive learning result</td>
<td>Limits, will power, separation, curiosity, exploration</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Lack of learning results</td>
<td>Fear of separation, shame, doubt</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Initiative vs. Guilt</td>
<td>Ages 4 – 5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Positive learning result</td>
<td>Purpose &amp; value, good feelings about self, healthy gender identity, imagination</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Lack of learning results</td>
<td>Feelings of guilt, being unacceptable, bad feelings about own sexuality</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
## STAGE TASKS

### 4 Industry vs. Inadequacy
- **Age 6 – 11**
  - Positive learning result:
    - Competence, self boundaries, thinking, Learning
    - Feelings of failure, inferior, incompetence.
  - Lack of learning result:

### 5 Identity vs. Role confusion
- **Age 12 – 18**
  - Positive learning result:
    - Inner sense of self, uniqueness, faithful to another person or cause, sense of belonging, feeling of self.
    - Confusion, rebellion, lacks sense of belonging or having power of regeneration
  - Lack of learning result:

### 6 Intimacy vs. Isolation
- **Age 16 – 25**
  - Positive learning result:
    - Can love & receive love, can be close yet separate, intimacy with self & another.
    - Separate from others, isolated, not reassured of self by love from another, loss of self to others.
  - Lack of learning result:

### 7 Generativity vs. Stagnation
- **Age 20 – 24**
  - Positive learning result:
    - Personal power to generate, create or produce; committed to life, caring fro others, society, planet.
    - Stagnation, feels life is boring, unexciting; feels incapable of caring for self, let alone family, neighbours, society, planet; lacks creativity
  - Lack of learning result:

### 8 Ego Integrity vs. Despair
- **Age 40 on**
  - Positive learning result:
    - Wisdom, accepts self completely & unconditionally, is one with all life.
    - Has decided that life has been a waste, unmeaningful & unproductive.
  - Lack of learning result:

### 9 Geotranscendence
- **Age 70 on**
  - Positive learning result:
    - Acceptance of death, healthy withdrawal.
    - Nonacceptance of aging, disability, death.
  - Lack of learning result:

## How do you generally behave?

Choice of answers:

4 = Almost always  
3 = Often  
2 = Seldom  
1 = Almost never
1. When I face a difficult task, I try my best & I will usually succeed
2. I am at ease around members of the opposite sex
3. I feel that I have a lot going for me
4. I have a very high degree of confidence in my own abilities
5. I prefer to be in control of my own life as opposed to having someone else make decisions for me

6. I am comfortable and at ease around my superior
7. I am at often overly self-conscious or shy when among strangers
8. Whenever something goes wrong, I tend to blame myself
9. When I don’t succeed, I tend to let it depress me more than it should
10. I often feel that I am beyond help

**Components of self-concept (Girdano & Dusek)**
- Healthy concept of self assures confidence, worth, security, spontaneity, & other positive descriptors of actualized person
- 6 major components of self concept, which are:
  - Self-awareness
  - Self-worth
  - Self-love
  - Self-esteem
  - Self-confidence
  - Self-respect
Self Concept consists of:

**Self-Awareness**
- realizing you have an impact in this world and your actions can and do influence others & vice versa.
- Being self-aware allows a person to see the interrelationships of all people & the part that one plays in his/her own growth & development, and also in others’

**Self-worth**
- an inborn part of self concept. No one worth is more or less than any other human on this earth. We are created equal.

**Self Love**
- inborn capacity to like self and earn self love, learn self forgiveness.

**Self-esteem**
- compassion for self that is earned through one’s actions; comes from success (interpersonal relationships, academic accomplishment, sports, doing well in jobs etc)
- self-esteem that is rewarded internally is lasting & enhances other self-concept components; if earned from outside, it can be taken away anytime; the needs for rewards & attention from others can become insatiable; loosing it can cause feelings of powerlessness, anger etc
- self-esteem is built upon honesty (esp. with oneself), responsibility for one’s perception of what is real, trust, listening to intuitions & acting on them; positive intent toward others

**Self-confidence**
- earned or learned ability to cope with perceptions of the world (an individual reality)
- success comes from seeing planned outcomes develop into real outcomes by using past resources, trust, hope and courage

**Self-respect**
- ability to honour or appreciate one’s emotional nature: to express fear, happiness, anger, love & joy appropriately when they are felt – expressing them appropriately
- holding back from expression an emotions can block energy & also shows lack of self-respect.
Generally, the more positive or better self concept leads to better coping skills, or increase level of confidence in overcoming stressors

Self fulfilling prophecy— you are what you believe yourself to be.
The likelihood of failure at some task will be greatly increased if you imagine yourself failing even more before the task is even begun
Perceptions of hopelessness & self devaluation can lead to increased stress levels

Coleman (1998); Ingram (1998)
Self perception also has its effect on hostility. People with low self esteem are more vulnerable to interpersonal insult than those with high self esteem,
Those with low self esteem become angrier than those with high self esteem when they are unsuccessful in getting an apology
Perception of hopelessness & self devaluation lead to an increased stress
Poor self concept play a significant role in the onset of various diseases
   It increases one's susceptibility to many diseases
Eliminate stress by improving perception of control and self worth.