

MANAGING STRESS IN DAY TO DAY LIFE

S. M. ANWAR YOUSUF
Associate Professor and Head
Division of Social Psychology
A N Sinha Institute of Social Studies, Patna

ABSTRACT

There are some psycho-social behavioural technique in eliminating, reducing, and managing stress. These are as follows: **Progressive Muscle Relaxation Technique** is widely used in clinical field for reducing mental tension. Based on substantial amount of evidence, it is believed that the mind gets calmer as a result of relaxing the muscle. **Body Scan Technique** is similar to progressive muscle relaxation except, instead of tensing and relaxing muscles, you simply focus on the sensation in each part of your body. **Cue Controlled Technique** is the conditioning process established as a result of which the individual feels himself relaxed whenever he think the Word "Relaxed". **Differential Relaxation Technique** focuses on controlling the levels of muscle tension while the individual is engaged in some other work or activity. It is presented after the person trained in progressive muscle relaxation technique. **Biofeedback** works as an adjunctive aid in psychotherapy. It is a way of achieving relaxation through the use of instrumentation. It facilitates the link between mind and body, because many of the physiological parameters are not voluntarily controlled by the individual during stress. **Problem Solving Skill** represents a logical and reasonably easily learned approach which can be used to overcome stress. It is based on the common sense principles. **Time Management** is a technique which makes a person able to manage the time successfully; he is more likely to control the majority of his stress at home, at school, at work place. **Assertive Technique** helps in reducing the stress, doubts, confrontation and enhances confidence, social skill. Assertive training teaches individual how to respond appropriately in social situations, to express their opinion in an acceptable ways and to achieve their goal. **Breathing** is an automatic process governed by centre in the brain stem (pons and medulla). It is considered as a potential method of influencing physiological arousal. **Social Support as a technique** has been highlighted as a shock-absorber against stress. During stress and crisis if a person is able to have appropriate support system it may take the trauma out of his life. **Physical Exercises** contribute to the well being of the individual. It improves physical fitness and the mental health. In earlier studies, it has been reported that regular exercises decreases level of tension, fatigue, aggression, depression and insomnia. Besides these, there are some Islamic ways of managing stress such as **The Faith Oasis, The Meditation and Relaxation Oasis, The Remembrance Oasis, The Imagination Oasis, and The Praying Oasis**. There are some other methods for managing stress i.e., healthy diet, adequate sleep, regular habits of walking, peace and harmony in life, and enhancing body's natural capacities.

STRESS MANAGEMENT IN DAY TO DAY LIFE

Stress has been defined in various ways and used in different disciplines such as engineering, anthropology, sociology, psychology, physiology, and medicine. In science, the concept of stress was initially used in physics where 'stress' is an external force applied to a system, and 'strain' is the change in the system that is due to the applied force Steptoe and Ayers (2004). Although there is some debate over the origins of the term 'stress' in biology and psychology, there is no doubt that scientist Walter Cannon and Hans Selye were influential in the study of stress in living organism: Cannon (1914) with his work on the fight-flight response, and Seley (1956) when he used the term 'stress' to describe the non-specific response of living organisms to noxious stimuli.

The influence of stress processes on health and risk of disease. The first is to assess the impact of particular categories of potentially stressful conditions, and the second is to investigate the aetiology of specific diseases. We will illustrate three common forms of stress: work stress, the stress of caring for elderly and dementing relatives, and low socioeconomic position. Other stressors such as marital and family conflict, unemployment, or neighbourhood and community stress could have been selected (Kiecolt-Glaser and Newton,2001). Many aspects of work are potentially stressful, including type of

work and work environment (noise, posture, machine pacing, shift work, level of social contact), organizational factors (time pressure, decision-making, career structure, resource problems), and personal factors (role conflict, work-home balance). Informal caring for demeaning, disabled or elderly relatives is increasingly common as people live longer, as medical technology allows more severely handicapped children and adults to survive, and as the provision of residential care services is reduced. The potential sources of stress in caring are great, although caring tasks can also be sources of satisfaction and self-esteem. There is an inverse relationship between socioeconomic positions, whether defined by occupation, income, or educational attainment, and morbidity and mortality from common illnesses throughout the developed world (Adler, Marmot, McEwen and Stewart, 1999). Thus poor and less educated sectors of society have higher rates of prenatal mortality, childhood accidents, diabetes, coronary heart disease, and many cancers. Some of this difference is not due to stress, but to difference in living and working conditions, exposure to pollutants and hazardous environments, and the direct effects of poverty (Evans and Kantrowitz, 2002). Many forms of chronic stress are more common in lower socioeconomic groups, including low job control, financial strain, neighbourhood living problems and exposure to crime. In laboratory studies, people in low socioeconomic status positions show more prolonged cardiovascular stress responses, indicating disturbance of homeostatic adaptive mechanisms (Steptoe et al., 2002). Thus stress-related psychobiological responses partly mediate socioeconomic inequalities in health.

Within therapeutic and human service areas, it is widely accepted that the effectiveness of a worker is directly related to his or her level of self-awareness (Brill, 1978). Stress management involves individual choices. These choices center on the question of whether or not one decides to become a victim of one's job, family, or other interpersonal relationships or situations. A decision to deal with stress positively is part of our responsibility to us. Ultimately, we are responsible for ourselves, our behaviour, and our physical and psychological health. While many people can help us with this responsibility, in the final analysis it is up to us as individuals to decide which choices we will make. The premise is simple: You can only change that which you, personally, can control, and in reality the only thing you can control is your own behavior.

The term stress is used to refer a wide variety of physiological, behavioral and cognitive phenomena. Unfortunately the term does not lend itself to easy definition as several symposia and literature reviews indicate (Appley and Trumbull, 1967; Lazarus, 1966). According to Appley and Trumbull (1967) the term stress was introduced into the life sciences by Selye in 1936. Selye's (1956) concept of stress is physiological in nature, with particular emphasis on endocrine functions. There is also considerable debate among stress experts about how to define stress. If stress is the level of anxiety perceived by the individual, we are left with the question of whether or not someone can be under stress without being consciously aware of it. On the other hand, if we talk about stressful situations, we are confronted with the fact that not everyone reacts to the same situation in a stressful manner. Finally, there seems to be a certain kind of stress that is positive, in that it gets us going, keeps our bodies strong, and so on, and we therefore must distinguish between "positive" and "negative" stress in our lives. A definition that combines both ideas has been offered by Monet and Lazarus (1977) "stress... consists of any event in which environmental demands, internal demands, or both tax or exceed the adaptive resources of an individual, social system or tissue system" (p.3).

This definition includes a number of concepts that merit further explanation:

(a) Environmental demands alone can be stress producers – Even the well-adjusted person can experience significant levels of stress from problems on the job, with the kids, with a spouse, or with difficult clients or bosses.

(b) Inner emotional conflicts alone can be stress producers – Even when one's life seems to be going smoothly, inner psychological feelings can cause a person to be under stress (such as feelings of love and hate toward a spouse, difficulty in accepting the fact that no one is perfect).

(c) Environmental and inner demands can combine to produce stress when either one alone might not – In a stress-producing environment, sometimes rather minor emotional conflicts can combine to produce major stress for the individual. For example, a person might be able to handle the heavy demands at work by working overtime, but this also causes feelings of guilt about being away from the family too much.

(d) All people have adaptive resources – Life and living involves many problems, and most people cope with these successfully. Even though we may be temporarily thrown off balance (such as when someone we love dies), we have both physical and psychological mechanisms that help us to regain equilibrium – we get back to normal eventually.

(e) Adaptive resources exist on several different levels – At the most basic, physiological level, our body tissues and systems are geared toward maintaining a state of equilibrium. For example, if our body temperature becomes too high, we perspire, and this in turn cools us down. On an emotional level, we forget things that are too painful to remember, or we avoid or remove ourselves from the hurtful situation. At the broadest level, social systems (such as families, communities) function so as to bring an errant individual or group back into line, so that social progress can once again operate smoothly.

(f) Stress involves situations in which our adaptive mechanisms are over-burdened – As is true on a bodily level, where muscles must be exercised in order to maintain their strength and flexibility; one needs a certain degree of stress in order to grow emotionally and intellectually. This will focus on negative stress, that which is overwhelming and overburdens our adaptive mechanism.

In relation to a working definition of stress, the concept must be considered in terms of the difference between acute and chronic stress. Especially in relation to environmental demands, it is evident that there are some situations in which there is an immediate and real emergency or threat – some kind of crisis involving potential physical harm or psychological loss. Our physical and psychological systems are designed to prepare us for action to actively deal with the danger or to avoid it. This ‘fight’ or ‘flight’ readiness is highly functional. It allows us to fend off attackers, to protect ourselves emotionally. It motivates us to study diligently for impending examinations. The important quality of this kind of stress is that it is reduced once the danger has passed and we are again able to return to a state of equilibrium after an acutely stressing experience.

In contrast, chronic stress involves a longer time frame that is one in which the person’s adaptive resources are being taxed (even mildly) for long periods of time. It is this chronic stress that causes long-term problems such as physiological, emotional, and interpersonal.

In each family, members eventually get programmed into a specific role and are labeled accordingly. According to Toman (1969), older children may be relied on to take leadership and control of younger siblings, and younger children become used to being taken care of. One or more members may take over for dysfunctional members, in order to maintain the homeostatic balance in the family. The terms ‘reciprocity’ and ‘collaboration’ have been used by family therapists to describe these functions. In similar ways, life in the work place can rely on the use of these strategies to maintain the balance, but not without cost to the worker’s level of stress. Bowen (1978) is of opinion that basic relationship patterns developed for adapting to the parental family in childhood are used in all other relationships throughout life. The basic patterns in social and work relationships are identical to the relationship patterns in the family except in intensity. Bowen has written extensively about the concept of differentiation of self in one’s family.

The concept of triangles provides a theoretical framework for understanding the functioning of emotional systems as well. A two-person emotional system is unstable in that it forms itself into a three-person system, or triangle, under stress. A system larger than three persons becomes a series of interlocking triangles. When one person in a relationship becomes hurt, angry, or frustrated, he or she tends to bring someone else into the relationship to shift the balance of power. Triangles are behaviours associated with stress but also can produce stress. One needs to be attuned to their existence within the organization, avoid being caught up in them, and maintain a separate relationship with each person.

It is important to become sensitized to the ways your own sense of self and your own coping style interact with the system in which you are trying to function.

The process of attempting to view problems from a different perspective is called ‘reframing’. Watzlawich, Weakland, and Fisch (1974) define reframing as an attempt to change the conceptual and/or emotional setting or viewpoint in relation to which a situation is experienced and to place it in another frame which fits the facts of the same concrete situation equally well or even better, and thereby changes its entire meaning. What turns out to be changed as a result of reframing is the

meaning attributed to the situation, and therefore its consequences, but not its concrete facts. It is not the things themselves which trouble us, but the opinions that we have about these things.

Although it is somewhat easier to evaluate situations where our attempts at solutions are making things worse, reframing is not an easy process. Here are some suggestions to help reduce stress:

1. Examine ways in which stress is a positive force for you. Think of areas in your life in which stress motivates you to be more productive, more sensitive, and so on. Separate these areas from ones in which you find stress to be a truly negative force.

2. Try to accept the idea that some stress is inevitable. It is unrealistic to imagine that we can eliminate it from our lives, no matter what jobs we have and no matter how fortunate we are.

3. View yourself as the first changeable element in your life. No matter how bad, stupid or unfair the other person or system is, the first thing you must gain control over is yourself.

4. Consider whether or not there has to be a solution or way out of a particular problem. Sometimes we can drive ourselves crazy looking for the answer, when in fact there is none, or we could get along fine without one. It is important to distinguish between problems that really do need our concerted effort and those which can be tolerated without much trouble.

5. Carefully examine situations that keep recurring and that you handle the same way over and over again. The fact that certain problems keep occurring is often a tip that the solutions tried in the past are not appropriate. Sometimes it is more effective to do the opposite of what you have tried before, or to ignore the problem and see what happens.

6. Take a close look at your expectations. Are some of them unrealistically high? Our own expectations for ourselves are perhaps even more stress-inducing. Obviously, it is important to have goals and a sense of working toward something important. On the other hand, we can also 'set ourselves up' for chronic disappointment and failure if our goals are not within attainable ranges.

7. Avoid 'should' and 'should not' types of thinking. Should always involve judgments and usually guilt. For instance, I should not be feeling the way I do, or I should be happy but I am not. This kind of thinking distracts us from what is and keeps us from dealing honestly with ourselves and others.

Ultimately, change is a difficult process to effect in our lives because it is often viewed as conflicting with reality. That is, often we cannot change because it would be unrealistic to do so. This is especially true for both sources of stress and the effects of stress sources.

As with the case of causes of stress, the way that the sources of stress affect us may be unchangeable, no matter how hard we try. Again, it is unrealistic to assume that one can or will be able to change how they feel about a given situation. If you feel frustrated because of your working hours, it may be impossible to change that feeling. What you may be able to change, however, is the intensity of the reaction, so that the feelings you experience are not as intense as they previously were.

Ultimately, change in your life can only realistically happen concerning those parts of you that you have direct and immediate control over. Consequently, the easiest things to change are our behaviours. Thus, when we examine the ways in which we act when we are reacting to stress, we need to ask ourselves a series of questions such as 'do we like the way we behave?', 'is it appropriate?', 'how does our behavior affect ourselves and others?', 'how might we change the way we behave or act?'.

Unfortunately, there are no simple solutions to the problems of stress, stress reduction, and your behavior. There is no magic to the solution of difficult life situations. Personal change requires hard work and perseverance on one's part. The point here is that one may decide upon one means of change for example, the use of private time for relaxation after work – which may or may not help one to reduce the stress one is experiencing. If the particular reduction technique does not work, then one

must try another approach. One should remember that there is not one technique or approach that works for everyone every time.

Closely related to the lack of simple solutions is our fear of changing our lives or behavior. Many of us develop patterns of living or behaving that, although they many have negative consequences for us, are comfortable because they are familiar. Some people view life or behavior change negatively or fearfully. Certainly, life or behavior change may cause some of us some level of anxiety. Our ability to adopt new behavior styles will determine our ability to successfully cope with, reduce, and prevent stress.

By way of a practical suggestion, it is recommended that one should start off slowly. Taking one step at a time. That is, one should probably choose a changing behavior pattern that is relatively low level or that causes one low anxiety, and more up from there to increasingly more difficult and sophisticated changes. One should, however, bear in mind that one must be able to live with and tolerate the particular changes one is engaging.

Merely talking about the stress we are experiencing is not enough. The point that we are making is that, while it is fine to talk about your stress, for this indicates ones ability to recognize stress, but it is necessary to do more than talk. We must be able to actually do something (that is change behavior) in order to reduce and prevent negative stress reactions.

For some of us, a professional helper may be useful as we contemplate life or behavior change. From time to time in most people's lives, the professional helper could be an invaluable aid in understanding ourselves and especially in gaining direction.

It has been interesting to observe how much attention is given to the limitations one has, or the negative aspects of one's life, rather than to what each has been able to achieve or accomplish. Most people restrict the use of their own potentialities. Being aware of one's strengths and capabilities is an important component of stress reduction. Now go through the following list of strengths and consider how many of these strengths you have:

1. Physical Strengths – Good health, taking care to maintain good health, ability to participate in sports and outdoor activities, exercise programs, special abilities such as swimming, running, throwing, good looks.

2. Emotional Strengths – Ability to give and receive love and affection, to experience a wide range of emotions, to express emotions appropriately, to empathize, to put things into perspective, to persevere, to take risks, humor.

3. Social Strengths – Ability to have relationships with people who can meet your needs for love and affection, understanding and support, relationship with family or friends who are a source of satisfaction, and who can provide emotional, financial, and physical support in times of trouble, ability to meet people easily, make people feel comfortable and understood, to talk freely with strangers, have good relations with neighbours, treat people with consideration, politeness and respect, to listen, to help others to be aware of their strengths and abilities as well as their limitations.

4. Intellectual Strengths – I.Q., any education, high school, college, vocation training, on the job training, scholastic honors, ability to do a good job, to assume special responsibilities, special abilities such as mechanical, sales, organizational, reasoning, problem solving, financial management, speaking or understanding a second language, playing music, creating art, ability to learn to write, to create, to speak in public, and so on.

5. Spiritual Strengths – Membership in and participation in religious place, feeling close to God, a Supreme Being, or Nature, expressing moral and religious values in daily living, searching for spiritual values, humility, recognizing the dignity and worth of each individual regardless of race or creed.

6. Other Strengths – Strengths that are a combination of the above such as having hobbies, ability to entertain oneself through appreciation of sports, art, music, nature, ability to create a comfortable, satisfying environment, take risks, and so on.

Recognizing needs in us is especially important for the maintenance of homeostasis. Human needs may be broken down into five major categories: physical, emotional, social, intellectual, and spiritual. The five categories of needs are broad statement that applies to each and every one of us. Yet the specifics of these categories differ from person to person.

Beside these there are some other psycho-social behavioural technique in eliminating, reducing, and managing stress. These are as follows:

Progressive Muscle Relaxation Technique: It is widely used in clinical field for reducing mental tension. Based on substantial amount of evidence, it is believed that the mind gets calmer as a result of relaxing the muscle. Here an individual learn to relax specific muscle group while paying attention to the feelings associated with both the tensed and relaxed states. Its aim is to achieve a state of deep relaxation and to control excess tension in stress inducing situation. Passive muscular relaxation technique involves no physical action. Relaxation occurs by virtue of thought process.

Body Scan Technique: A body scan is similar to progressive muscle relaxation except, instead of tensing and relaxing muscles, you simply focus on the sensation in each part of your body.

Cue Controlled Technique: Here the conditioning process is established. As a result of which the individual feels himself relaxed whenever he think the Word “Relaxed”.

Differential Relaxation Technique: It focuses on controlling the levels of muscle tension while the individual is engaged in some other work or activity. This applies both to the muscles actively involved in the task and to the muscles not directly engaged in it. It is presented after the person trained in progressive muscle relaxation technique.

Biofeedback: It works as an adjunctive aid in psychotherapy. It is a way of achieving relaxation through the use of instrumentation. It facilitates the link between mind and body, because many of the physiological parameters are not voluntarily controlled by the individual during stress. Biofeedback helps a person in developing control during stress. Biofeedback helps a person in developing control over the said physiological parameter.

Problem Solving Skill: It represents a logical and reasonably easily learned approach which can be used to overcome stress. It is based on the common sense principles; therefore it is attractive to kids and adolescents. It is sometime, the only treatment approach used as adjuncts to other psychological and physical treatment.

Time Management: If a person is able to manage the time successfully; he is more likely to control the majority of his stress at home, at school, at work place. Dropping activity schedule often increases anxiety and other behavioural vulnerability.

Assertive Technique: Assertive behavior help in reducing the stress, doubts, confrontation and enhances confidence, social skill. Assertive training teaches individual how to respond appropriately in social situations, to express their opinion in an acceptable ways and to achieve their goal. A variety of techniques like role playing, positive reinforcement, desensitization are used in assertive training program.

Breathing: It is an automatic process governed by centre in the brain stem (pons and medulla). It is considered as a potential method of influencing physiological arousal. The technique is easy to learn. During stress our breathing pattern gets disturbed which may arouse many physiological symptoms.

Social Support: Research has highlighted the importance of social support networking that act as a shock-absorber against stress. During stress and crisis if a person is able to have appropriate support system it may take the trauma out of his life. Thus, support networks are worth developing.

Physical Exercises: Adequate amount of exercises contribute to the well being of the individual. It improves physical fitness and the mental health. In earlier studies, it has been reported that regular exercises decreases level of tension, fatigue, aggression, depression and insomnia. It also benefits the muscles ligaments and joints as well as bones.

Those who are extremely stressed can also find peace and relaxation by utilizing different Islamic 'oases'. Medicines have not been proven to be inefficient in dealing with the original causes of stress, nor can it adequately eliminate all of its symptoms. Medicine may be necessary for a person in the most critical stages of chronic stress, but medicine alone may not be enough to achieve a cure for all its symptoms. Scientists are trying to find new strategies to cope with stress and minimize its effects. These include relaxation techniques, meditation, imagination and Yoga. Most of these techniques are rooted in Islamic spirituality and different Islamic forms of worship, ibadat, which can be if performed in the correct manner considered as good tools for coping with life's stresses. Those who are extremely stressed can find peace and relaxation for their minds, body and soul utilizing the following different Islamic 'oases'. Since its inception, Islam has proposed several oases from stress and here we will discuss them briefly. These are:

1. The Faith (iman) Oasis: Some people are more able to cope with stress than others. The determining factor of the level of stress experienced is the perception of something as a threat, which triggers the stress response, and not the threat itself. It seems that the stress response is not created by any particular type of event or situation but rather by the way that event is perceived. It turns out then that stress response is a matter of perception, and/or awareness. The stress reaction is activated by neural perceptions or by what amounts to one's worldview. A worldview can be described as the prism of ideas and beliefs through which the world is perceived or judged. This means that your worldview becomes central to the way any stressful circumstances are handled.

Islamic spiritual practices can dramatically alter your worldview and thereby restore your feelings of self worth and personal meaning, giving you a feeling of deeply rooted power and control. Control has been found to be a key factor in the psychology of chronic stress. Those who feel most powerless or unable to control their circumstances tend to experience the highest levels of stress. On the other hand, those who feel they have great personal control and power over themselves and their environment will be much less likely to experience the hormonal stress response, and this is regardless of the potential seriousness of the threat. In Islam, Muslims feel Allah, who controls the whole world and all the creatures in it, supports them.

2. The Meditation and Relaxation Oasis: Meditation is really a natural quality of the mind. With meditation, the mind is trained to pay attention and to follow commands. In this way, one learns to quiet the thought traffic in one's mind, thereby freeing up mental and physical energy. The basis of meditation is to adopt a posture of body and mind that allows one to remain comfortable for long periods of time without expending significant amounts of energy. Meditation works by eliciting the relaxation response. The relaxation response is characterized by decreased heart rate, respiratory rate, oxygen consumption, and muscle tension. Meditation seems to produce these changes to a greater extent and more efficiently than sleep. Also meditation is used intensively and effectively in control of cases with chronic pain and anxiety disorders. Meditation by concentrating on Allah's creatures (i.e., plants, animals, space, human body, etc.) is considered one of the most efficient and powerful forms of Islamic worship. In this form of meditation, one concentrates on an object or group of objects from the same category.

3. The Remembrance (Zikr) Oasis – Meditation can be done by concentrating our thoughts on an object or group of objects of the same category. Meditation can also be performed by concentrating on one word or a few words that give the person a sense of internal peace and calm, for example by repeating the words *Subhan Allah* (glory be to Allah) or *al-hamdu lillah* (all praise be to Allah). Deep and silent repetition of such words produces the same physiological effects of meditation. It also adds an additional factor that helps in stress elimination and that is giving the individual the feeling that he or she is in extreme proximity with Allah, the Controller of the whole world.

4. The Imagination Oasis - This is considered one of the most powerful methods of stress reduction. During this practice, the person imagines that he or she is in a place, which gives him internal peace, calmness and rest. Muslims can find their safe place through imagining what will be present in the Paradise.

5. The Praying Oasis – This includes all of the previously mentioned oases including meditation, remembrance and imagination. While praying, each one of us feels that we are in extreme connection with the controlling power of this world (Allah) and that from Him we receive maximum support. Recent scientific investigations show that praying reduces post-operative complications following open-heart surgery. Praying also markedly reduces the percentage of patients exposed to depression following hospitalization. Now days, doctors suggest that praying can be used as an alternative therapy as successfully as meditation, exercise, or herbal treatments. Many doctors believe that praying with their patients before and after surgery or before administering a course of powerful drugs might actually assists in the patient's recovery. Five time daily prayers have been prescribed to Muslims. This is a good chance to make use of that time not only for spiritual enhancement but also for physical and psychological healing.

There are varying methods for managing stress i.e., healthy diet, adequate sleep, regular habits of walking, peace and harmony in life, and enhancing body's natural capacities.

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