

Unit 10 Trauma and Stress Management

Structure

- 10.0 Learning Outcome
- 10.1 Introduction
- 10.2 The Concept of Trauma
- 10.3 What is Stress?
- 10.4 Symptoms of Stress
- 10.5 Types of Stress
- 10.6 Sources of Stress
- 10.7 Management of Stress
- 10.8 Conclusion
- 10.9 Key Concepts
- 10.10 References and further Reading
- 10.11 Activities

10.0 Learning Outcome

After going through this unit you should be able to:

- provide a comprehensive view of the concept of trauma;
- explain the meaning and nature of stress;
- bring out the symptoms of stress;
- highlight the types of stress and its sources; and
- examine the management of stress

10.1 Introduction

Disaster varies in terms of their types, severity and duration. The term disaster is commonly used to denote any odd event; it may either be natural or man-made. Disaster causes great loss of life, property, injury, hardship and adverse effects on physical as well as mental health. The victim suffers from great trauma. It affects the victim's life deeply and result victim

suffering from a feeling of insecurity. This traumatic experience generate stress within the individual.

Stress is a natural and unavoidable feature of life. An individual faces many obstacles – environmental or internal for the gratification of need. These obstacles make the individual stressful. Thus stress is anything that stimulates to act and it increases the level of alertness, but too much of stress becomes unpleasant and tiring. Sometimes excess of stress, may damage individual's physical and emotional health. Stress is something very individual, some people can tolerate all sorts of pressures without the feeling of distressed, while others find it difficult to cope when life gets stressful. Therefore to make life healthy and comfortable, it is necessary to understand stress and to control or reduce it more effectively. In this unit we will be discussing the concept of trauma, meaning and nature of stress, examine the symptoms of stress, highlight the types of stress and its sources and know about the management of stress.

10.2 The Concept of Trauma

Trauma is a Greek word, the original meaning of trauma is wound or damage to body tissue. As mentioned in dictionary – trauma is a powerful shock that may have long lasting affect. The term psychological trauma describes a condition in which a person has experienced a difficult event that has wounded his psyche. Accidents, explosion, fires, plane crashes, earthquakes, tornadoes etc. are such terrifying experiences that not only affect the people physically but mentally hurt them as well. Other events such as the sudden loss of loved ones, social disgrace or severe financial losses may also prove extremely traumatic. Trauma is a condition in which individual's physiological, psychological and emotional state get disturbed. Adler (1943) reported that over half the survivors of the disastrous coconut grove fire in Boston, required treatment for severe psychological shock.

The traumatic event is usually unpredictable and uncontrollable. It shatters one's sense of security and leaves one vulnerable and agitated. The traumatic conditions are not only the ones in which a person is directly involved, sometimes the news of the death of someone close or any other shocking news may be traumatic for a person.

There are two important factors which make an event traumatic, there are:

- (a) Threat of death or serious injury to us or to another person.
- (b) Strong feeling of fear and helplessness.

These feelings affect the behaviour and responses of an individual. Victim suffering from shock may develop a wide range of symptoms, depending upon the severity and nature of the terrifying experience, the degree of surprise and the personality make-up of the individual. A 'disaster syndrome' has been observed among the victims of tornadoes, explosions and similar catastrophes. This syndrome, which appears to characterise most of the people in disaster, may be described in three stages as follows:

- 1) **Shock Stage:** In shock stage victim is stunned, dazed and apathetic. Frequently he is unaware of the extent of his injury, and tends to wander about aimlessly. The victim finds himself unable to make more than minimal efforts at aiding himself or others.
- 2) **Suggestible Stage:** In this stage individual become passive, suggestible and willing to take directions from rescue workers or other less affected than himself.
- 3) **Recovery Stage:** Individual gradually regains his psychological equilibrium, often with the help of mild supportive psychotherapy at a hospital or other aid centre. He may become critical of rescue and relief workers. The victim may become tense, jumpy and apprehensive and may sometimes have difficulty in concentrating and sleeping.

10.3 What is Stress?

Rarely a month go by without our hearing or reading the news of an earthquake, volcanoes, hurricane or flood occurring somewhere in the world. Apart from these natural disasters there are many man made disasters which create intense anxiety and stress among individual. There are many obstacles both environmental and internal, which interfere with out need gratification and make the goal complicated. Such an obstacle place adjustive demands or stress on the organisation.

What exactly is stress? The dictionary suggests pressure or strain. But in medical parlance, it is the body's response to a situation or an environment that is unwelcome, unwarranted, unconquerable and unplanned. Scientific evidence states that when one is experiencing stress, the brain produces high levels of two specific hormones – adrenalin and cortisol – produced by the hypothalamus.

According to psychological viewpoint, stress refers to be in a state of imbalance within an organism that (a) is elicited by an actual or perceived disparity between environmental demands and the organism's capacity to cope with these demands and (b) is manifested through a variety of psychological, emotional and behavioural responses. This response syndrome occurs as a result of the organism's exposure to excessive environmental demands or stress. Each individual faces a unique pattern of adjustive demands. Individual's age, sex, economic status, personality make-up and other factors help to determine the demands made on him. A child facing the stress pattern differs in many respects from that of an older person. The effect of stress also depends upon the severity of the stress. Mild stress may improve the performance of individual, whereas, severe stress tends to impair integration and effectiveness and excessive stress eventuates in a breakdown of the system.

Stress need not always affects us negatively being present in our day to day life. Stress is a part of response to any challenge, any demand or any opportunity. It generates the energy necessary to convert our thoughts into action. Thus stress not only helps us in our survival but also facilitates our

growth. The best example of improved performance with increasing level of stress is in disaster. We find ourselves working tirelessly whenever there is a natural calamity like fire or floods. It is possible because stress triggers a physiological response to energise our body, but if this response is triggered too frequently or continues for a long time, people start feeling tense and anxious. In this stage individual becomes distorted and has struggle to cope with it and now the stress becomes distress. The relationship between stress and performance can be shown with the help of this graph.

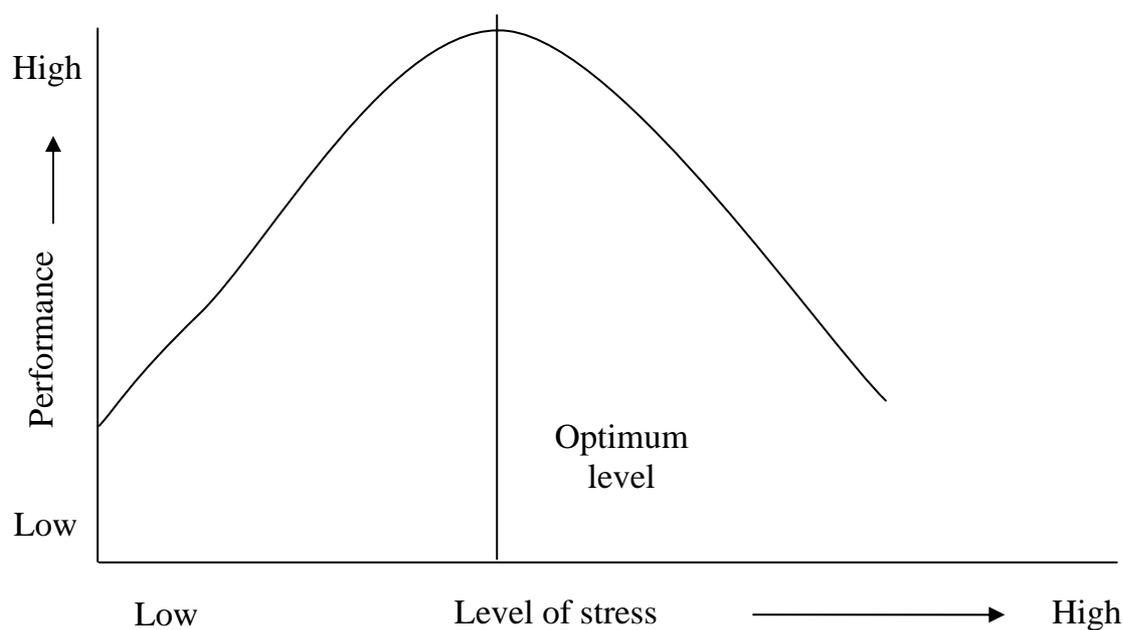


Figure 1 : Stress-Performance Relationship

Figure 1 shows that low level of stress is as determinable to performance as excessive stress. The performance improves with increasing stress level up to an optimum level of stress. Up to this level, the stress is positive and people feel alert and focussed. But if the stress level rises above this optimum level, the stress becomes negative and people feel tense and

wound-up. After having such high level of stress for a long time they become exhausted and have difficulty in enjoying life.

10.4 Symptoms of Stress

If a person is exposed to stressful situations continuously and his stress-bearing capability is low, the person will start experiencing the negative symptoms of stress. During and after a disaster, victims suffer from intense stress. They may show a variety of symptoms that express their stress. These symptoms are like early warnings that the stress level is reaching a critical point. These excessive stresses can cause serious harm to the health and well being. The first step toward managing stress is, therefore, identifying these symptoms. Different people show different symptoms depending on their personality, their life style and the nature of work they are engaged in. Symptoms of excessive stress can be categorised into four manners as follows:

1) **Emotional disturbance:** When the stress experience is very intense or prolonged, it leads to the development of various emotional problems, which keep on disrupting normal life of a person even when the stress is not there. Important stress related to emotion includes:

- Irritability Feeling lonely
- Anger Sense of futility
- Hopelessness Feeling of being
- Fear/panic Worthless

2) **Disruption of thought process:** Another warning sign of excessive stress in people is the inability to think clearly or the disruption of thought processes. Under stress, one's ability to organise thoughts in

a logical and coherent way is impaired and the person is distracted by his/her own thoughts. Because of the mental distraction things do not register in the memory and the person becomes forgetful and confused which causes more stress. Some important mental signs of excessive stress are as follows:

- Trouble making of mind or making decision
- Forgetfulness
- Mind goes blank
- Being easily distracted
- Constant working

3) **Physical Discomfort:** When a person is continuously under stress, he gradually loses the capacity to fight with various diseases. The physiological impact of excessive stress depends on the general stage of physical fitness. Physical symptoms of excessive stress are not always visible at the time of acute pressure and sometimes health problems resulting from stress occur as much as one year after the stressful event. People exposed to stressful situations in life may manifest the following symptoms:

- General weakness
- Digestive symptoms (indigestion, constipation)
- Respiratory symptoms (breathing difficulty, allergy)
- Skin problems
- Muscular symptoms (backache, neck ache)
- Bladder problems
- Cardiac symptoms (palpitation, chest pain etc.)

4) **Behavioural Changes:** In stressful conditions individual exhibits varied behavioural problems. Typical behavioural problems associated with excessive stress include:

- Poor sleeping habits
- Excessive eating/loss of appetite
- Excessive drinking
- Increase in smoking
- Criticising, blaming or ridiculing others compulsively
- Taking pain killers frequently

10.5 Types of Stress

The types of stress are anticipatory, current, residual and positive which is described below:

Anticipatory Stress

Anticipatory stresses are those where mind and body prepare in advance for change, crisis or challenge. Examples of this type of anticipatory stress are numerous. Tension before a test, fear of an impending hurricane, dread of forced retirement etc. are the good example. In flood prone area of the country advance preparation by the people and the government for its management is a good example of anticipatory stress.

Current Stress

Current stress arises during an experience of stressful situation. Current stress if harnessed effectively is vital for optimal performance. For example body's extreme alarm during earthquake or the surge of energy in the final hundred meter race.

Residual Stress

During residual stress, the body remains in a state of arousal after the event has passed. It may be positive or negative. Over stimulation, whether pleasant or unpleasant, can have the same effect. Markowitz in his study

observed that fire-fighters exposed to a dangerous chemical had psychological symptoms which persisted even after 22 months.

In another study it was found that fourth hurricane victims the symptoms continued even up to an average of 16 months after the event (Krause, 1987), Residual distress has also been reported among disaster rescue and cleanup workers.

Positive Stress

This is moderate in nature and it helps the individual to respond quickly and forcefully in physical emergencies, such as fighting a fire, averting an auto collision etc. Positive stress is useful in performing well under pressure. It also helps in pushing the limits of the individual.

10.6 Sources of Stress

Stress is physiological and psychological response which gets triggered when people perceive an unbalance between the levels of pressure placed upon them and the capability to face that pressure. If we analyse the causes of stress, the list will be wide ranging. The sources of stress can be divided into two categories:

- Stressful life events and
- Chronic stressor

1) Stressful life events

Throughout life people are faced with a whole series of changes, sometimes beyond the control, which have to be managed. A life change event leads to disequilibrium and it causes a lot of maladjustment. A large number of life changing events within a short period of time, often generates symptoms of stress. Some of life events, which can cause a lot of turbulence in life are as follows:

- Death of loved ones: death of spouse, death of a close relative
- Change in marital stability divorce, separation, serious arguments
- Change in honour: failure, dismissal, disciplinary action
- Change in social status : retirement, demotion promotion

- Illness/injury : self, close family members dislocation
- Transfer to a new place, change in residence, on vacation
- Change in financial status : Sudden financial loss/gain, decrease in carry home income, increase in liabilities.

2) **Chronic Stressors**

There are some chronic stressors too. Continuous unrelieved state of stress is referred to as chronic stress. It is the result of those threats, constraints and uncertainly, which people have to face day in and day on.

Frustration

Every individual has some needs and desires and Frustration occurs when the important needs and desires remain unsatisfied. Some of the important human needs include sex, material possessions, security, recognition etc. People need to feel secure against uncertainties of future. They feel threatened with any misfortune or something a likely disaster. This need is satisfied by constructing a house, having a bank balance and investing for future needs. Many people have a high need for power and control over others. They satisfy this need through their position in office or communality. They may feel stressed if they find themselves being controlled by others.

Conflict

Conflict is the important source of stress and frequently leads to tension and inner turmoil. Conflict arises between two need or valued goals, in which choosing either alternatives means leads to frustration with regard to the other .Sometimes, amongst various goals, choosing one or the other goal is very difficult so people suffer from great stress. For example, in post disaster situation a grieved victim gets much stressed out and feels either to leave the place or to remain in the same disaster prone area where he belongs. In this situation these two aspects of life can often be in conflict and it is not always easy to find the right option.

Pressure

Problem of adjustment may stem not only from frustration and conflict but also from pressures that complicate our strivings. These pressure occurs from

situations usually beyond our immediate control. Excessive demands also work as pressure that occur as a result of too much responsibility, deadliness or mentally tiring job. If the stress bearing capability of an individual is low, even small amount of pressure will become a burden for that person.

Pressure also occurs when a relationship fail to fulfil expectations. At work relationship should provide stimulation, support and friendship. If individual faces personality clashes, lack of trust and support criticism and cut throat competition in the work relationships, the persons is bound to feel stressed. At home relationship should provide emotional security, love and a sense of belongingness. Similarly, a relationship can create pressure if the person is misunderstood or rejected, the more intimate the relationship, the more pressure will be felt by the person. Pressure may arises from being fearful about future at work , feeling unable to work at full capacity, or job satisfaction etc.

10.7 Management of Stress

Stress is a complex issue involving the mind, body and emotions; and leaves its impact on individual's physiological and psychological conditions. Lazarus et.al. define coping as.... 'constantly changing cognitive and behavioural efforts to manage specific external or internal demands that are appraised as taxing or exceeding the resources of the person' (1984, 141).

Some people manifest the physiological symptoms of stress more than the others. They need to take some positive steps towards sustaining the physical well-being; this includes taking care of the food habits exercise, sleep and rest. We will discuss below the ways of managing stress.

Food habit

What we eat and drink has a lot of implications for our stress bearing capability. We take food to provide us energy, necessary to remain normal throughout the day. This strategy help to thrive on stress by giving increased energy to meet the demands.

Regular exercise

Regular exercise makes a man strong and healthy. When a person is healthy, all systems within the body receive a flow of energy. In case of an overloaded from exercise, stress, some system ceases to receive energy. Physical exercises helps a person to relax the tense and tight muscles, improve blood circulation and eliminate chemical from the system.

Rest and Sleep

Our bodies require regular rest and sleep to recoups energy and revitalize us. During sleep the body also repairs itself. Both quantity and quantity of sleep and rest are important

Developing Emotional Maturity

Many people react emotionally to stress. Those people who react to stressful situations emotionally require developing their emotions stability. To release the emotional pressure, an individual has to control the emotional impulsivity. Stress can be reduced by developing support system to remain calm even in the most adverse circumstances.

Release emotional pressure

People who do not fully express their feelings often become anxious, restless and troubled. Some people hide their emotions in distress, their pent up emotions do not disappear, but go underground and hamper the individual. The best way will be to release emotions. An individual should choose a person before whom he can express himself. He may express his feeling by weeping, laughing and scolding.

Gather external emotional support

Every one has a need to be recognized and accepted for the person that they really are. True emotional support comes therefore, from being both known and loved in a crisis like disaster. Sometimes people suffer from feeling of loneliness, this feeling also develops insecurity among them. Survivor may take this limitative for

rescue workers or relatives to help the survivor to build up a network and support group.

Relax Consciously

In post disaster phase it is very difficult for the survivor to overcome the stressful events that he faced in past. There are some relaxation techniques which also play an important role in reducing stress which are as follows.

Deep relaxation: Meditation, yoga, self-hypnosis and other methods for eliciting the relaxation response have been used for centuries to cope with the stressors of daily living. Deep relaxation restores energy, yields creative solutions to problems and physically calm the person for facing difficult situations. Victims suffering from trauma or stress should utilize it in everyday routine as part of living.

Exercise: Exercise is a highly effective coping mechanism. Consistent daily or near daily exercise may serve as prevention of distress. In one of the study fifty five college students who reported a high number of recent negative life events participated in an experiment comparing groups having physical exercise, relaxation training, no treatment, while all reported improved health over the two week period of the study, the exercise group showed a greater drop in depressive symptoms (Roth & Holmes, 1987). In another study Sime (1987) found that among 15 moderately depressed men and women ranging in age from 26 to 53 , depression scores were significantly lower as noticed after 10 weeks, 6 months and 21 months of exercise.

Prayer: For centuries, prayer has been used to cope with tension. Prayer increases hope and optimism. In draught it is seen that people perform 'havana and yagya' to please the God of rain Indra. It can bring practical solution in such a situation. The belief in divine guidance and solace helps create a positive self fulfilling prophecy. Managing stress wisely through awareness of self direction is entirely consistent with religious belief and practice. After all, God helps those who help themselves.

Hobbies

Many people find total relaxation by spending time pursuing a favourite activity. Favourite recreational activities like gardening, golf, hunting, photography, book reading or watching professional basketball on television can also help prevent or reduce stress in several ways. Hobby is a good companion of an individual, where by developing his hobby an individual may get away from the stressors and will never feel himself lonely. People feel happy and relaxed when they do something that gives pleasure to them, hence, their stressed muscles and nerves also become relaxed

By developing positive attitude towards life

People affected by disasters suffer from great physical and emotional problems. After loosing their relatives and properties in a disaster, the survivors loose hope in life. This technique will help them to identify disappointments. It is necessary to let go of the past because people have no control over the future. Survivors will only feel disappointed by thinking of previous jobs, relationships and dreams, which never materialized. In spite of thinking about the past, survivors may find alternatives for future situations. By concentrating on the present they can achieve a better balance between activities and feeling.

People should always remember that they have maximum control of themselves and very little control of other people. They should try more to work independently so that they will get less frustration when others do not meet their expectation.

People should condition their attitudes to expect periodic set-back. Everyone has to face up and downs in their life, therefore, in worst situations also, they should not loose pride and self respect.

10.8 Conclusion

Disaster causes great loss of life, property, injury and adverse by effects the physical as well as mental health of the affected people. Those suffering from these traumatic experiences become stressful. In stress, the victim exhibits different physiological, psychological and emotional symptoms. There are different types of stress- in positive stress the performance of individual improves,

in anticipatory stress the people prepare in advance for any crisis. Stress may also be physiological and psychological. When the crisis passed away and victim is still in stress, this type is called residual stress. In our day to day life there are a number of sources which make us stressful, like death of loved ones, changes in social status, change in financial status, etc. Whereas some stressors are chronic, frustration, conflict and pressure come under this group. These stressors create stress in people and their life get disturbed. Sometime the stress is so intense it disintegrate, the life pattern of an individual. So it is necessary to properly reduce the stress. There are different techniques to manage the stress in a tactful manner so that the victim may lead a proper life.

10.9 Key Concepts

- Psyche** - Mind or soul
- Trauma** - Wound
- Equilibrium** - Balance between individual and environment
- Distress** - Mental pain
- Depression** - Emotional state of mind characterised by feelings of gloom and inadequacy.

10.10 References and Further Reading

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10.11 Activities

- 1) Explain the concept of trauma. Discuss the symptoms of Stress.
- 2) What are the factors upon which physical well being depends on?