

Life Event Stress

M. Brindhamani, T. Manichander

¹Vice Principal, ²Research Scholar

¹Vidhya Sagar College of Education for Women, Chengalpattu, Tamilnadu

²Faculty of Education, IASE, Osmania University, Hyderabad

Introduction

The concept of stressful life events is enshrouded by a thick veil of confusion and divergence of opinion. It has been used by the researchers as a term for stress – producing events and conditions (SPEC's – By McGrath and Beehr 1990) that are social and psychological rather than physical. The life event stress is conceptualized with situational encounters with a meaning that a person may attach to such events. It refers to our feeling that something important to us is being jeopardized by events in our daily lives. In other words the stressful life events are causally implicated in a variety of undesirable effects on our performances and health.

Stress in Everyday Life

In everyday life, we come up with a wide range of pressures. We have different kinds of coping strategies to cope with these pressures. When we fail to cope up with pressures, stress arises. Technically the stressful situations put the individual under pressure which may have harmful and unpleasant or disabling effects. Now a days it is very difficult to think of a stress free life. Stress comes in all shapes and sizes and has become so pervasive that it seems to permeate everything and everybody. Stress is unavoidable consequences of life. Without stress there would be no life.

Stress and Human Psychology

Stress is a major source hurting human being. In common parlance stress is experienced when an individual becomes incapable to cope with the demands of environment. People always have had to cope with the expected and the unexpected. Even our ancestors had to face events like uncertainties of climate, food supplies, and relationship with the neighboring tribes etc. as stressful events. One writer refers these events as major events. For a child going to school and facing new faces and new challenges are stressful.



Students going from high school to college, marriage are another stressful event - Pleasurable it may be but stressful. For a women child – rearing process, children leaving home-either for further studies or after marriage, menopause, retirement, death of a husband are all stressful life events

The Effects of stress

The environmental psychologist H.S. Asthana, in his keynote address at the National Symposium in Stress, Coping and Mental Health (1998) has pointed out that the stress seen in India today is because of conflicts within the value system – especially related to the role of women. The role of stressful life events in the etiology of various diseases has been a fertile field of research for the last 25 years. It is becoming recognized that stress can be one of the components of any disease not just those designated as “psychosomatic”. “The diseases of our times are etiologically linked with excessive stress and in turn this stress is a product of specific socially structured situations inherent in the organization of modern technological societies”. Stress as conceptualized by Selye (1956) is a broad and general concept like anxiety, describing the organism’s total reaction to environmental demands. Arnold stated that stress is any condition that disturbs normal functioning. According to Cooper and Appley, stress is the state of an organism where he perceives that his wellbeing is endangered and that he must divert all his energies to its protection. Lazarus refers stress to physiological behavioral and cognitive responses to events appraised as threatening or exceeding one’s coping responses and options. According to Caplan, Marshal and Cooper, stress is a stimulus or a situation to which man reacts with learned coping mechanism activated by homeostasis principle and fuelled by energies which are infinite in supply. Stress could be distinguished at the social and physiological level. Psychological stress is the presumption that person interprets and guides every adaptation interchange with the environment, and uses cognitive activities, evaluates perception and thoughts.

Selye’s research supports the assumption that the experience of stressful life events increases the risk of morbidity and even mortality. Local factors are dump in the determination of stress. It is possible that even with the stressors used by Selye, the stress response was mediated by the emotional disturbances, discomfort and pain caused by these noxious states. Stressful life events are the stress events / situations which the individual experience during a



given period of time in life. Because the accumulation of minor irritations may also be stressful, alter has been focused on the cumulative health of daily stresses include having too many meetings (at job) thereby not having enough time for one's family.

Stress is a phenomenon of being stretched by the demands made on an individual, beyond the limits of his /her potential to cope. It is basically pressures that impinge on man and make him suffer under it. Such situations constitute the rules and not the exceptions in life and that is why we have not just to learn to live with them, but more so to learn to conquer them as a victorious general. In modern societies, we are obliged to face the situations in their face, and also control and regress our reactions of pain and fear which have grave psychological consequences leading to what we call the situations of 'stress'. Lazarus, a chief proponent of the psychological view of stress maintain that when individuals confront a new or changing environment, they engage in a process of primary appraisal to determine the meaning of the event. Life event may be perceived as positive, neutral or negative in their consequences. Negative or potentially negative events are further appraised for their possible harm, threat or challenge. Harm is the assessment of the damage that has already been done by an event. A women for example, is fired by her boss may perceive present event as harmful in terms of her own loss of self esteem. Threat is the assessment of possible future damage that may be brought about by the event. Women who lost her job may anticipate the problems of loss of income. Finally events may be appraised in terms of 'challenge', the potential to overcome and even profit from the event. A women who has lost her job may fell that how she would be better taking care of her children and home in better manager and will search for a new job later on.

Generally all definitions of stress emphasize on one aspect i.e. in terms of events/situations – known as stressors. It includes variety of external and internal stimuli that evoke stress such as noise, delays, losses, crowding, bad relationships, or highly competitive work environment.

Cause of Stress

Stress can emanate from variety of sources. Pestonjee (1992) has identified 3 important sectors of life from which stress may originate:

* **Job and Organization:** These refer to the totality of the work environment such as job description, work culture, interpersonal relationships and compensation offered.

* **Social Sector:** Denotes the socio-cultural milenn of a person. It may include religion caste, language, attitudes and beliefs of other, the political and legal environment etc.



***Intra psychic Sector:** This encompasses those aspects which are and personal such as an individual's values, abilities, temperament, personality, needs, expectations and health.

Brown (1984) has listed five categories:

- * Customary anticipated life events (major change in life) such as marriage, divorce, beginning / ending of school, children leaving home and retirement.
- * Unexpected life Events: (any major life event which occurs suddenly) like sudden loss of job, major accident, becoming aware of a terminal illness.
Progressive, accumulating – situational events (any continuously) recurring problems in life, activities) like daily hassles, job and family stress, school stress and competition.
- * Personality Glitches (any personal traits that create social problems) such as poor communication, low self – esteem, insecurity, lack of confidence, poor decision making and fear of failure.
- * Value dependent traits: Circumstances generating thought feeling conflict) like revolution, broken homes, moral dilemmas like cheating or failing, and peer pressure v/c personal conscience.

Types of Stress

Life events stress may be short – term or on-going: Traditionally, the assessment of life experiences has conceptualized such life events as short – term experiences. But now it is not so. The role of a woman – as a traditional housewife has changed to multiple roles. Hence stressors are now ongoing. Moos and Swindle (1990) indentified domains of ongoing stressors which reflect chronic forms of life experiences as:

- (a) Physical health stressors
- (b) Home and neighborhood stressors (Safety and cleanliness)
- (c) Financial stressors
- (d) Work stressors
- (e) Spouse related stressors
- (f) Children related stressors
- (g) Extended family stressors



(h) Friend related stressors

They incorporated these factors and developed the Life Stressors and Social Resources Inventory. They argued that life events should not be evaluated in isolation but should be integrated into two facets of an individual's life, their ongoing social resources (social support) and their ongoing stressors.

Criticisms have been raised concerning the tactic of aggregating total life events to generate an overall score. Many studies on life events have turned the total number of events into a single score by aggregating all life events experienced within a given time frame. This approach treats all events the same, without taking into account the subjectively and perceived importance of each event. Since life event inventories cover a variety of events of different importance, equating those events may be insensitive in capturing the significance of different life events, and it may fail to detect the effects of specific events that generate a great deal of stress. Some researchers have suggested the use of a more dimension specific approach, focusing on specific kinds of events by dividing scales into categories, such as health related events and loss events.

- (1) The personal events: Personal events like marital conflict, sexual difficulties, trouble with neighbor, change in residence, or in sleep, eating habits etc are subjective in nature. Such events vary from person to person and even its intensity of experience varies.
- (2) Impersonal events: Stressful events like death of a friend, son / daughter leaving home, marriage of a daughter / son, appearing for an interview, retirement etc are the events that are positive and negative at the same time.
- (3) Desirable and undesirable event: "Events are positive in nature. Events like marriage of a daughter or dependent sister, getting married, outstanding personal achievement, new family member, a pleasure trip on holidays. The undesirable events are negative in nature. They are not welcomed as it gives negative feelings to a person, who experiences it. Events like death of spouse, extramarital relations of a spouse, divorce, separation, lack of child, robbery, theft, broken love affair etc are undesirable events. It causes more depression especially when they came all of a sudden. Such events are unpredictable also affecting health.
- (4) Ambiguous events: Events like change in working conditions, birth of a daughter, change in eating habit, wife / husband begins or stops working, begin or end schooling are not



very much specific in nature. Such events are like stressful as compared to unpredictable and undesirable events.

Conclusion

Stressful life events might have been found to disrupt women's sense of self, and thereby negatively influencing their mental health. The presence of acute stressors may have greater depressive influence in the part of women which affects their physical health too. Women are more likely to experience stressful events in their lives as more stressful and this leads their vulnerability to depression. Thus social support softens the impact of potentially stressful events.

References

- Srivastava. A.K. (1983) Role- based stress and mental health of white collar employees. *Indian Journal of Clinical Psychology*.10.343-347.67.
- Srivastava A.K. & Singh. H.S (1988) Modifying effects of coping strategies on the relation of organizational role stress and mental health. *Psychological Reports*.62.1007-1009.68.
- Sekaran U (1982) "An investigation of the career salience of men and women in dual career families" *Journal of Vocational Behaviour*-20.161-174.
- Sharma. S. (1988) Stress and anxiety. In J. Pandey (Ed.) *Psychology in India. The State-of-The -Art. Vol. 1* (pp.191-248). New Delhi: Sage.
- Rajbir S and Radhy S (2007) *Psychology of well-being* Global vision publishing House, New Delhi. India.

