

L- 7 – Psychology - Stress

Stress : - refers to experiencing events that are perceived as endangering one's physical or psychological well – being or it is the response to events that threaten or challenge a person .

Stressors : - these events that are perceived as endangering physical and psychological well-being of the individual . some stressors are Acute last a short time, other stressors are chronic , the source of stress can be within the individual in the form of conflicting motives or desire . Events that are perceived as stressful usually fall into one or more of the following categories **traumatic events** , **uncontrollable events** or **unpredictable events** , **events that represent major changes in life circumstances** , or **internal conflicts** .

Traumatic events :- situations of extreme danger that are outside the usual range of human experience , e.g. natural disaster such as earthquake and floods , man – made disasters such as wars , and nuclear accidents , catastrophic accidents such as car or plane crashes and physical assaults such as rape or attempted murder . The degree to which an events is stressful differ for each individual , that is , people differ in the extent to which they perceived an event as controllable , predictable and a challenge to their capabilities and self – concept and it is largely these appraisals that influence the perceived stressfulness of event .

The response to stressful events : -

has three components

1 – **An emotional response with somatic responses** : - these are of two kinds ,

a - **Anxiety responses with autonomic arousal** leading to

apprehension, irritability ,tachycardia , increased muscle tension and dry mouth so anxiety responses are generally associated with events that pose a threat

b – Depressive responses with pessimistic thinking and reduced physical activity are associated with events that involve separation or loss . These features of these responses are similar to but less intense than the symptoms of anxiety and depressive disorders .

II – Coping strategies : - serve to reduce the impact of stressful events , thus attenuating the emotional and somatic responses and making it more possible to maintain normal performance at the time but not always in the longer term , the term is derived from research in social psychology , it is applied to activities the person is aware for example deliberately avoiding further stressors coping strategies are of two kinds : -

A – Problem– solving strategies which can be used to make adverse circumstances less stressful .it include : -

1 – Seeking help from another person .

2 – Obtaining information or advice that will help to solve the problem.

3 – Solving problems : - making and implementing plans to deal with the problem .

4 – Confrontation : - defending one's rights and persuading other people to change their behavior .

B- Emotion – reducing strategies which alleviate the emotional responses to the stressors .it include : -

1– Ventilation of emotion : - talking to another person and expressing emotion .

2 – Evaluation of the problem : - to assess what can be changed and try to change it by problem- solving and what cannot be changed and to accept it.

3 – Positive reappraisal of the problem : - recognizing that it has led to some good for example that the loss a job is an opportunity to find a more satisfying occupation .

4 – Avoidance of the problem : - by refusing to think about it , avoiding people who are causing it or avoiding reminder of it .

Coping strategies are generally useful in reducing the problem or lessening the emotional reaction , however they are not always adaptive , for example avoidance may not be adaptive in the early stages of physical illness because it can lead to delay in seeking appropriate treatment , hence a person needs not only the ability to use coping strategies but also the ability to judge which strategy should be used in particular circumstances .

Maladaptive coping strategies : - These strategies reduce the emotional response to stressful circumstances in short term but lead to greater in the long term , it include the following : -

1 – Use of alcohol or unprescribed drugs to reduce the emotional response or to reduce awareness of stressful circumstances .

2 – Deliberate self-harm either by drug overdose or self-injury, some people gain relief from tension by cutting the skin with sharp instrument to induce pain and draw blood , others take overdoses to withdraw from the situation or show their need for help .

3 – Unrestrained display of feelings can reduce tension and in some society such behavior is sanctioned in particular circumstances for example grieving , in other circumstances such behavior can damage relationship with people who would otherwise have been supportive .

4 – Aggressive behavior : - aggression provide immediate release of feeling of anger , in the longer it may increase the person's difficulties by damaging relationship .

Effective coping strategies : - depend on the nature of the stressor and the degree to which control is possible . still some general guidelines can be followed : -

1 – Turning threat into challenge : - the best coping strategy is to treat the situation as challenge focusing on ways to control it .

2- Making a threatening situation less threatening : - if it is uncontrollable it is possible to change one's appraisal of situation to view in different light and to modify one's attitude toward it .

3- Changing one's goals : - is to adapt new goals that are practical in view of particular situation.

4- Taking physical action : - to cause changes in one's physiological reaction to it , by exercise and training to give sense of control over body as well as a feeling of accomplishment .

5- Preparing for stress before it happens :- preparing for stress before it encountered it is by providing individuals with clear objective strategies for handling the situation by inoculation.

Coping styles : - when particular coping strategies or mechanisms are used repeatedly by the same person in different situations they are constitute a coping style , some people change their coping strategies according to circumstances for example , they use problem – solving strategies at work but employ avoidance when unwell , some people habitually use maladaptive strategies for example they repeatedly abuse alcohol or take overdoses of drug when under stress later has distinguished between Coping style which is seen as a relatively enduring behavioral trait and coping response which is much more specific to particular stressful environment .

III- Defense mechanism : - are unconscious responses to external stressors as well as to anxiety arising from internal conflict , they are originally described by Sigmund Freud and later elaborated by

his daughter Anna Freud , defense mechanisms are unconscious processes i.e people do not use them deliberately and are unaware of their own real motives , although they become aware later through introspection or through another person's comments , the concept of defense mechanisms have proved useful in understanding many aspects of the day- to – day behavior of people under stress , notably those with physical or psychiatric illness .,

General adaptation syndrome : - a set of physiological reactions to stress occurs regardless of the particular cause of stress or it is a set of responses that is displayed by all organism in response to stress .it has three phases:-

1– The alarm and mobilization stage : - the body is mobilized to confront a threat by triggering the sympathetic nervous system activity .

2 – The second phase is resistance :- the organism attempts to cope with the threat by fleeing it or fighting it .

3 – The third phase is exhaustion : - occur when the organism is unable to flee from or fight the threat and depletes its physiological resources in attempting to do so .

Categorizing stressors : -

1 – Cataclysmic events : - are strong stressors that occur suddenly and typically affect many people simultaneously like disasters like tornadoes and plane crashes .

2 – Personal stressors :- major life events such as the death of a parent or spouse or the loss of one's job or major personal failure or the diagnosis of a life-threatening illness.

3 – Background stressors : - daily hassles , everyday annoyance such as being stuck in traffic these are minor irritations of life that we all face time and time again like noisy cars trucks , broken

appliances , other people's irritating behavior , or experiencing dissatisfaction with school or job .

Learned Helplessness : - A state in which people conclude that unpleasant or aversive stimuli cannot be controlled – a view of the world that become so ingrained that they cease trying to remedy the aversive circumstances even if they actually can exert some influence .

The Hardy personality or Hardiness : - is a personality characteristic associated with lower rate of stress- related illness and consists of three components : -

1 – Commitment : - is a tendency to throw ourselves into whatever we are doing with a sense that our activity are important and meaningful .

2 – Challenge:- they believe that change rather than stability is the standard condition of life to them the anticipation of change serves as an incentive rather than a threat to their security .

3 - A sense of control – the perception that people can influence the events in their lives .