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APPRAISING NATURAL DISASTER AS A STRESSOR

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ABSTRACT

This study discusses natural disaster as a stressor. Through literature, authors have been able to identify the various way by which this happens. Various ways were suggested on how to manage stress by people who experience them. In conclusion, we believe that stress generally affect the individual, how to handle it depend solely on the individual efforts.

Key Words: Natural Disaster, Stressor.

INTRODUCTION

Human beings at one point in time experienced high degree of sorrows, fears and other psychological discomfort as they interact in the environment. Some of these can be beneficial while others cannot. All these are accompanied by what we can termed as stress.Stress generally is regarded as when we feel that everything seems to have become too mcuh – i.e. we are overloaded and wonder whether we really can cope with the pressures placed upon us. Anything that poses a challenge or a threat to our well-being is a stress. Some stresses get you going and they are good for you – without any stress at all many say our lives would be boring and would probably feel pointless. However, when the stress undermine both our mental and physical health, they are bad. Stress can be thought of as any event that strains or exceeds an individual's ability to cope Lazarus, (1999). Leading causes of death and disability such as heart disease and stroke are almost certainly linked to stress Aboa-Eboule, et al.,(2007). Stress can also be seen as the physical and mental response of the body to demands made upon it. It is the result of our reaction to outside events, not necessarily the event themselves. Not all stress is bad. We each function best and feel best at our optimal level of physiological arousal. We need some stress to get everyday obligations done. Too little can lead to boredome and 'rust out' – but too much can produce 'burn out'. When you are stressed, your body responds as though you are in danger. It makes hormones that speed up your heart, make your breathe faster, and give you a burst of energy. Some stress are normal and even useful. Stress can help if you need to work hard or react quickly. For example, it can help you win a race or finish an important job on time. But if stress happens too often or last too long, it can have bad effects. It can be linked to headache, an upset stomach, back pain, and trouble sleeping. It can weaken your immune system, making it harder to fight off disease. If you already have a health problem, stress may make it worse. It can make you moody, tense or depressed. Your relationships may suffer and you may not do well at work or school. At this junction, we can say that this paper is guided under four sections. The first section deals with the nature of stress. The second part will discuss the sources of stress. Third will look at how too much stress affect our lives. While the last part of this paper will say something about management of stress. Having discussed about the nature of stress above, our attention will now focus on the sources of stress.

Sources of Stress

Most of soources of stress are obvious to us all – they rip and tear at our lives – but other sources of stress are quite surprising. The major sources of stress include the following factors:

1. Life Events – life events create stress and require adjustment and coping Dohrenwend, (2006) Monroe et al., (2007). Some of these life events can be positive or negative. Psychologists studied some of these negative life events which are regarded as the most stressful.

i. Violence, war, and sexual assault – many studies document that being in a war (Bayer, et al., 2007; Pitman, 2006; Vinck, et al., 2007) and being the vicitim of a sexual assault or other violent crime are profoundly stressful experiences Dohrenwend, (2006) Gilboa-Schechtman & Foc, (2001).

ii. Loss of a family member – the death of a spouse or a child can be tremendeously stressful Dohrenwend, 2006). For example, in a study conducted by Sidney Zisook and Stephen Schuchter (1991) examined the stresssful effects of the death of a spouse in a large sample of women and men. The result of their findings reveals that widowed women and men were more likely to exhibit serious depression during the first year after the death of their spouse than were married women and men who had not lost their partners.

iii. Natural disasters – this can also be powerful stressful negative life events. People who in their lives experienced or witnessed hurricanes, earthquakes, tsunamis and other natural disasters tend to be more stressful Asarnow et al., (1999) La Greca, Silverman & Wasserstein, (1998) Roussos et al., (2005).

iv. Terrorism – this is another factor that can make people to experience stress. Terrorist activities have of recent been regarded as one of the most heneous crime perpetrated by some group of individuals for the purpose of achieving certain goals. For many years, people in many troubled parts of the world have had to cope, with the stress of terroristic attacks. For example, the "Boko Haram' menance which started sometime in 2009 that resulted in the lost of lives and properties with millions of naira destroyed as a result of various attacks in the North Eastern part of Nigeria. Not surprisingly, many studies have found that anxiety, depression, sleep problems and intrusive flash-back thoughts about the disaster were common long after the attacks, particularly for those who were near the attack or who lost loved ones or posessions Druss & Marcus, (2004) Holman et al., (2008).

v. Daily hassles – it is not surprising that major negative events are stressful, but the small hassles of daily life are also important sources of stress. The pressures and work, getting a speeding ticket, loosing your glasses and countless other daily irritants can grate abrasively on mind and body Ben-Ari & Lavee, (2004) Monroe et al, 2007).

vii. Positive Life events – even positive life events can be stressful under some circumstance Dehrenwend, et al, (2006) Sarason, Johnson, & Siegel, 1978). Factors associated with positive life events includes, the birth of a child, promotion in work place, college graduation and buying a new house etc. These make people to think positive, but they may require also stressful adjustments in patterns of living. People sometime are unware of these life events that make them anxious and stressful.

2. Frustration – this results when people cannot satisfy their motives. You can see frustration in the face of a child who cannot reach the toy he dropped. When frustrations are serious, as in the case of underpaid workers who are denied raises, or when individuals experience the limits imposed by racial discrimination they can be a major source of stress. Gallo & Mathews, 2003; Mays et al., (2007).

3. Pressure – the term pressure is used to describe the stress that arises from threats of negative events. For example, in school, there is always the possibility that you will not perform well and you will fail. Some jobs are loaded with possibilities for making a mess of things and getting fire Melamed, et al., (2006).

Some unhappy marriages are source of pressure because one spouse always seems to displeasure the other, no matter how hard he or she tries to avoid it. These are ways in which stress occurs and can affect the individuals lives. This will lead us to the next section of the paper.

EFFECTS OF STRESS

Stress affect the individuals in so many ways. These includes:

a) Physically – here the individual heart pumps faster, making the heart pound and blood pressure rise; some people experience palpitations. Muscle tension increases leading to headaches, dizziness, jaw ache and even insomnia. The mouth goes dry, digestion slows causing "butterflies" in the stomach. Breathing is faster and less efficient which can lead to over breathing (hyperventilation) and breathlessness. Changes in the flow of blood to the skin can cause sweating, blushing or clammy hands and feet.

b) Mentally – a certain amount of stress can be mentally stimulating but too much can affect our thinking ability. Thoughts may become jumbled and confused. Thinking becomes focused on worrying. We may become preoccupied with problems. It becomes much harder to make decisions or find solution to problems. Thinking negatively and fearing the worst increases worry and stress.

c) Emotionally – people respond to stress in many different ways. Common emotional effects are irritability, impatience, anger, frustration, fear, anxiety, self-doubt, panic despondency, feelings of inadequancy, insecurity, hoplessness, unhappinness, emotional withdrawal and depression.

d) Behaviourally – stress can change people's behaviour towards one another. We may become less sociable, less caring, more hostile and insensitive towards others. When stress is accompanied by anger, we may become less tolerant, fly off the handle easily and provoke rows. Many people respond to stress by eating, drinking or smoking much more than is usual, some engage in risk taking behaviour etc. People experienced these stress depending on their interpretation of the situation they found themselves. How are these stresses managed by the individual. This will now be discussed in the last section of this paper.

MANAGING STRESS

In managing stress, the key to success is to think positively; take control of your stress and anxiety by learning effective techniques to combat it. Relaxing bodily tension in order to reduce the physical sensation of stress is a good place to start. If your body is free of tension, your mind tends to be relaxed. This helps you concentrate and study, take decisions and solve problems. When you are relaxed, you can view each task as a positive challenge, and use stress as a stimulus to help you carry it out, giving you a relaxing glow of achievement afterwards. Below are some of the ways that can help us to some extent manage our stress:

i. Looking after youself – be kind to yourself. Give yourself "me time" in which you can choose what you want to do: rest, do nothing, try a relaxation technique, massage or yoga, have a long hot bath; spend time with friends; treat youself to something special. Taking proper breaks and eating well do help to combat stress.

ii. Confronting the problem – try to stand back and look at the problem carefully. Break it down into manageable parts. Talk it through with some one else, brainstorm solutions or get help if you need it. Try to manage your time effectively and learn to say "No". Avoidance won't make the problem go away and can often make it worse. Think about why you are finding it hard to get started; uncertainty about how to do the assignment, fear of being judged or failing? Starting a piece of work effectively reduces stress level as it frees your mind, putting the thoughts of failure back into perspective. If you have had a row or a misunderstanding with someone, it rarely helps to avoid the issue. Talking it through with the other person or with someone outside the situation, often helps you express your feelings, regain a sense of proportion, and identify a way of resolving the differences.

iii. Find some distractions – sport and physical activity helps you to relax physically and also releases endorphins in the body which produce a real feeling of well-being. Walk, cycle, join a gym or a sports team. Joining a club or society, maintaining an existing hobby or learning something new, talking to other people – can all help you to take a mental and physical break.

iv. Express yourself – talking about it, write about it, shout or moan about it: expressing your feelings can help to relieve stress. Acknowledging a problem to yourself and to others can be the first step in dealing with it. Sometimes having a good cry or bashing a pillow can release emotional pressure and calm your feelings of anxiety.

v. Division of labour – try to delegate your responsibilities at work, or share them. If you make yourself indispensable, the likelihood of your feeling highly stressed is significantly greater.

vi. Seek professional help – if the stress is affecting the way you function; go and see your doctor. Hightened stress for prolonged periods can be bad for your physical and mental health.

CONCLUSION

From the body of this work above, it can be concluded that stress affect almost all facet of our lives. People experienced stress in various forms and in different situations. How to handle it depends on individual's availability of resources. Some of these stresses can make us to adjust in order to attain or achieve a certain goals while others tend to distract us and causes prolonged depression that could lead to different major psychological disturbances and even death. It could also be deduced that stress is manageable in so many ways ranging from the individuals engages in exercises to reduce tension and seeking professional helps to address the situation for greater performance.

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