

<b>Subject</b>	<b>Organisational Behaviour</b>
<b>Paper No and Title</b>	<b>Paper 1; Management Concepts &amp; Organizational Behaviour</b>
<b>Module No and Title</b>	<b>Module 32; Stress Management</b>
<b>Module Tag</b>	<b>COM_P1_M32</b>

<b>Principal Investigator</b>	<b>Co- Principal Investigator</b>		<b>Co- Principal Investigator and Technical Coordinator</b>
<b>Prof K V Bhanu Murthy</b> Professor of Economics Department of Commerce University of Delhi Delhi-110007	<b>Dr Jaswinder Singh</b> Principal SGTB Khalsa College University of Delhi Delhi-110007	<b>Dr. R P Singh</b> Associate Professor SGTB Khalsa College University of Delhi Delhi-110007	<b>Dr Vimal Rarh</b> Deputy Director, Centre for e-Learning and Assistant Professor, Department of Chemistry, SGTB Khalsa College, University of Delhi  <i>Specialised in : e-Learning and Educational Technologies</i>
<b>Paper Coordinator</b>	<b>Content Writer</b>		<b>Reviewer</b>
<b>Rtn. Dr. Ajay Kumar Singh</b> Paul Harris Fellow (PHF) and Fellow of ICA Department of Commerce Faculty of Commerce and Business Delhi School of Economics University of Delhi, Delhi - 110007	<b>Dr. Nidhi Dhawan</b> Assistant Professor Zakir Hussain Delhi College, University of Delhi		<b>Dr. Namita Rajput</b> Associate Professor Sri Aurobindo College, University of Delhi
<b>Anchor Institute : SGTB Khalsa College, University of Delhi</b>			

**COMMERCE**
**PAPER No.1 : MANAGEMENT CONCEPTS AND ORGANISATIONAL BEHAVIOR**  
**MODULE 32. : STRESS MANAGEMENT**

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## 1. Learning Outcomes

After studying this module, you shall be able to:

- Learn about Stress
- Identify various parameters of stress
- Learn about how stress is different from pressure
- Identify four levels of variations of stress
- Understand Good and Bad stress
- Identify stressors at different levels- Individual and Organizational levels
- Learn about the individual consequences of stress
- Identify organizational consequences of stress
- Appreciate that there are many ways also to manage stress
- Learn about stress coping strategies- Individual level and organizational level

## 2. Introduction

### Concept of Stress

Stress is a situation which a person is incapable of handling either because of lack of knowledge or skills or due to any other reason beyond his control. Such situation pressurizes a person to do what he is not actually able to do, and if such circumstances continue to persist for a long time having high demands with no breaks, then it could result into health problems (behavioural, mental, and physical). Greater desire and needs linked with high degree of uncertainty to fulfill the demands causes stress.

## 3. Definition of Stress

Robbins (1992) stated stress is “a dynamic condition in which an individual is confronted with an opportunity, constraint, or demand related to what he or she desires and for which the outcome is perceived to be both uncertain and important”.

## 4. Basic Features of Stress

Stress is dependent upon the situation and individual reaction towards that situation depends on individual perception. The basic features of stress are stated as follows:

- Stress can arise in the form of psychological and physiological stress.
- When an actual situation does not turn out to be an expected situation, stress arises.
- Stress is based on symptoms.
- Actual stress is a result of ignoring the potential stress which is based on symptoms.
- Stress can be both positive (Eustress) and negative (Distress).
- Stress arises due to interaction of a person with some factors.
- Stress is a reaction that arises through person and external factors interaction.
- Job stress may be due to individual or workplace factors.
- Stress is related to the attitude of the person. The personality of the individual to adapt to a particular situation is also a crucial factor in managing stress.

The outcome of stress can be physiological and psychological disorders such as cardiac arrest, high blood pressure, neurological disorders, neck pain, chest pain, depression, anxiety, feeling of neglect, anger, irritability, feeling of failure, low self esteem, etc.

## 5. Different Parameters of Stress

### 5.1 Pressure and Stress

Too much of stress is not required to work but it is the pressure that is required for a person to do work; and, therefore, too much of pressure is a cause of stress.

The term pressure refers to those features of a situation that may be problematic for the individual and that amount to demands for adaptation of some kind. Stress, on the other hand, refers to a specific set of biochemical conditions within the person's body- conditions that reflect the body's

attempt to make the adjustment. In short, pressure is in the situation; stress is in the person. A demand on the person and inability to cope with those demands due to lack of knowledge is a major cause of stress.

### 5.2 Stimulus and Response

**Stimulus as Stress** - Stress acts as stimulus or external force on the organism. Stress as stimulus means any event of life or that circumstance when individual cannot respond to it adequately and that are responsible for all types of reactions whether physical or psychological that leads to illness.

**Response to stimulus** - Stress as response or changes is described as a physiological function. Selye (1976) defined stress “as the nonspecific response of the body to any demand made upon it”. An alternative meaning to the term “stress” focuses on the responses or reactions of the person rather than the situations producing them.

### 5.3 Physically induced and Emotionally induced Stress

**Physically Induced Stress** It affects one’s body by the immediate environment in the form of virus, heat, cold, high exposures to ultra violet or infra-red radiation from sunlight. It affects homeostatic equilibrium of the body and is also called as somatic stress.

**Emotionally Induced Stress** It is persons own thought process that causes stress without any physical stressor coming into contact with the body. Such a stress arises from one’s imagination. It does not stem from a stressor but rather from an electromechanical trigger signal originating in the higher portion of the brain which by a process not yet fully understood- excites the hypothalamus and sets off the entire chain of chemical events. It also means that a person perceives that an event or an anticipated happening will bring very unpleasant results e.g., a sudden news of the death of the loved one. Emotional stress is based on the wrong imagination about the future happenings.

### 5.4 Eustress and Distress

Only when stress is allowed to become excessive; it may give rise to sickness and strain. Some stress is required to get success, but unnecessary stress is a cause of negative stress. External forces causes stress, these forces on their own are not stressful. It is how a person considers these threats or situations and take action accordingly that becomes a cause of stress. Stress is perceived differently by individuals. It can never be same for two persons; for one, it may be negative and for another, it may be viewed as positive.

Most of the people experience stress due to variety of environmental or situational factors (stressors) and when they are unable to cope with these stressors they experience negative stress or Distress or bad stress which causes pain, anxiety, depression, and mental pressure that must be overcome. This is due to an imbalance between the mindset and body responses which an individual is not able to cope up with the changes at workplace resulting into acute (not last for a long period of time) and chronic stress (arises for a long period of time). When these same stressors are viewed as challenging, interesting, and motivating factors, people experience positive stress or good stress or Eustress. It prepares mind and body together in one direction to deal with the challenges and cope with it successfully. According to Pestonjee (1992) stress could have a positive or negative consequence depending upon how it is perceived.

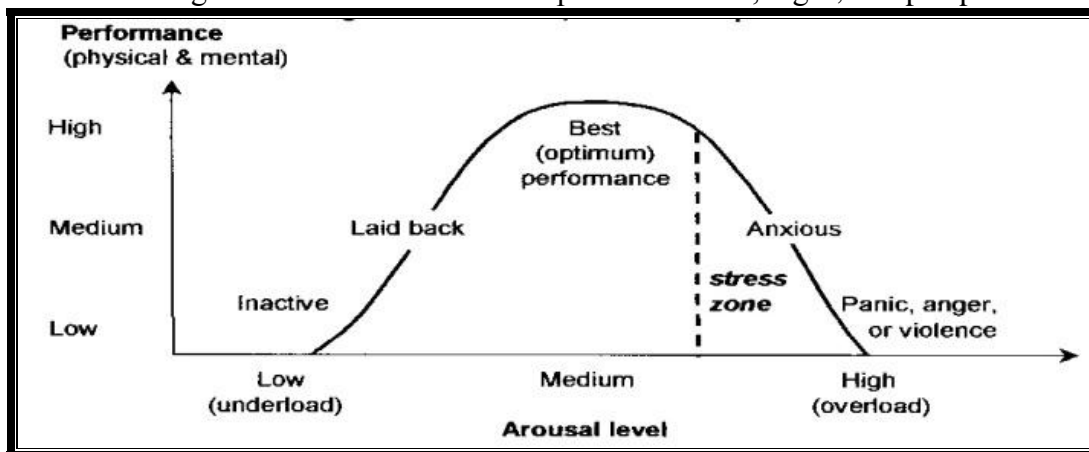
### 5.5 Hyper stress and Hypo Stress

Similarly, depending upon its intensity, there is overstress (Hyper stress) and understress (Hypo stress). Hyper stress is negative stress caused due to inability to manage workload such as long

working hours given to a person that he could not manage easily resulting into emotional breakdowns and mood swings giving chronic disease or physiological reactions. Hypo stress arises when individual has no work or less work, a cause of de-motivation and boredom. This all is due to insufficient stress a person is suffering from. So, therefore, some amount of stress is good for a person to get the work done.

### **Inverted U relationship of Stress and Performance**

An Inverted-U or Bell shaped relationship indicates that performance improves with increasing stress to a certain level beyond which as stress continues to increase, the performance declines. The rationale behind this relationship is the ‘Motivation Factor’. As motivation and the drive to achieve increases, the level of stress rises along with productivity and efficiency. A person working at optimum level shows enthusiasm, high morale, mental clarity, and good judgment. When pressures of the job are unreasonable, performance is again low as stress drains the person’s health, vigor, and perspective.



Stress and Performance Relationship

## **6. Different types of Stressors**

A stressor is a chemical or biological agent, environmental condition, external stimulus or an event that causes stress to an organism. There can be different types of stressors such as Workplace factors, Family, Personal relationships, relationships at workplace, Legal, Finances, Health/illness, Environment,

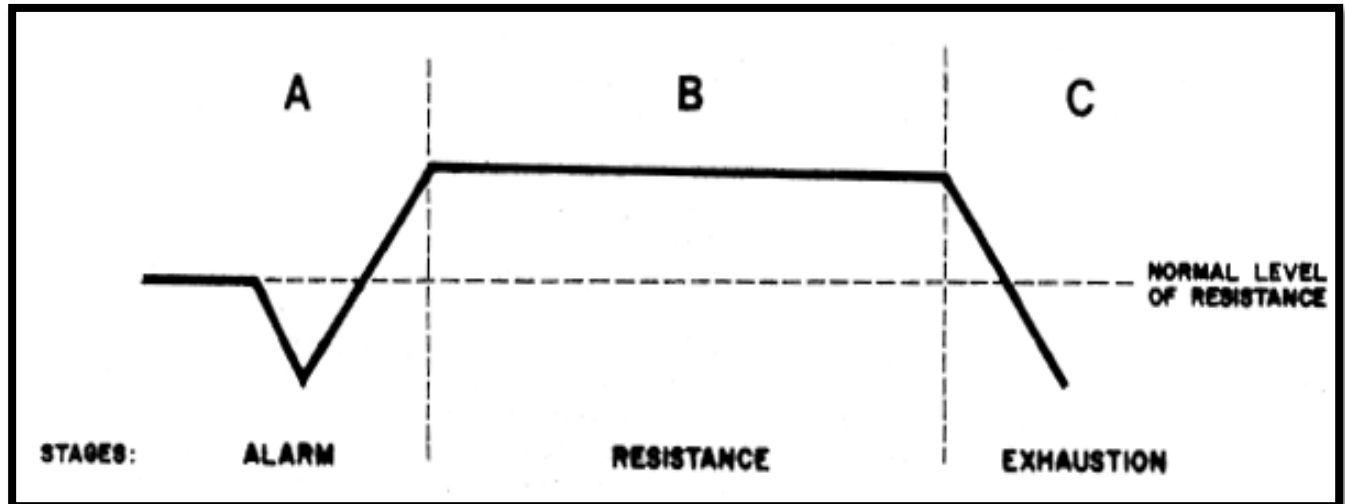
### **6.1 Individual Factors- a cause of stress**

People who are under extreme stress do not perform well either at workplace or in other facets of their lives; they reduce their capacity for pleasure and their ability to interact with others. Stress bearing capacity varies from individual to individual depending upon the type of personality, how he reacts to the situation, and responds to it. Excessive stress is particularly deadly for those with “Type A” personality characteristics exhibiting high risk, coronary prone behaviors, and many a times, high chance to have heart problems than are their low risk and relaxed, “Type B” counterparts.

Because of the differences in the personality in terms of perception, experience, etc., individuals differ in their manner in responding to organizational environments.

- Logical reasoning and interpretation of an event on a subjective scale, perception of thing in a general sense (factual and complete) and an unconscious inner perception of the personalities help in understanding the environment.

- With the passage of time; experience in the job reduces



stress levels. Dealing with various aspects of job challenges and learning as well as accepting things gradually by developing mechanisms to deal with stress from different situations helps in minimizing stress levels. As a result, experienced individual also adapts calm and cool attitude by way of ignoring various stressors.

- On the other hand, an individual with aggressive behavior feels more stress.

**6.2 Organizational Factors- a cause of stress** Organizational stressors are those stressors which are beyond the control of the individual at workplace resulting into frustration. This may be due to the lack of knowledge, skills, and understanding one has, to perform the job affecting one's health. There could be several reasons for job stress like an individual is not getting the required appraisal from the job accomplishments. The work-based stressors come from the job a person does and the environment within which a person does that job. There are infinite numbers of stressors operating at work and these are explained as follows:

- Factors intrinsic to the job
- Role in the organization
- Relationship at work
- Organizational structure and climate and
- Career development occupational change

## 7. Consequences of Stress

### 7.1 Individual Consequences of Stress

**7.1.1 Physiological Consequences:** Stress influences the biological system of the human being. Stress can lead to slow breathing, the heart rate gradually diminishes, blood pressure drops, the blood gets redistributed, and affects sleep, diet, creates muscular tension, disease. The result of high physical stress also leads to high metabolic rate affecting the body glands and disrupting the body functioning. Selye (1976) has pioneered the view that regardless of the specific noxious stimuli be it a wound, infection or psychological assault, the body will respond with the same



type of reaction. This reaction is the body's way of defending against the damaging and restoring the system to normal. The defense against a "stressor" is called by Selye, "the General Adaptation Syndrome" (G.A.S.) that comprises of the following three phases:

1. Alarm
2. Resistance
3. Exhaustion

1. **Alarm Stage-** A stage where a brain detects a threat or stressor triggering the responses. In this stage, the general resistance of the body to the particular stressor tends to drop below normal.
2. **Resistance Stage-** In this stage, a body adapts to the stressors and appears to be coping.
3. **Exhaustion stage-** A stage in which the body's energy stores and hormone reserves being depleted, which could lead to stress related conditions such as hypertension or depression as the stress response systems becomes exhausted. If the stress continues for a long enough periods, the third stage may be precursor to death or collapse of the organism. Also called manifestation of stress.

**7.1.2 Psychological Consequences:** A psychological consequence of stress is related with one's health emotionally. It is related with one's thought process. When people experience too much stress at work, they may become depressed or may find themselves sleeping too much. Stress may also lead to family problems and sexual difficulties. Other psychological symptoms of stress can be anxiety, tension, depression, a feeling of unable to cope, obsession problems, feeling of neglect, anger, guilty, and worry, lack of interest in life, loss of sense of humour, feeling of failure, irritability, low self-esteem.

**7.1.3 Behavioral Consequences:** The behavior of an individual also changes with stress levels, resulting into smoking habits, alcohol intakes, drug abuse, nervousness, shivering a sense of withdrawal from the society leading to isolation. It can also lead to anxiety, apathy, depression, and emotional disorder. Other behavioral consequences are accident proneness, violence, and appetite disorder. Stress and behavior related fallouts are stated below:

- i) **Perception and Decision Making:** Stress affects the decision making power and interpersonal understanding and communication of the employees. **Developing Attitudes:** A negative attitude is developed in the employee due to stressful environment causing adverse influence on job performance.
- ii) **Learning Capabilities:** An ability to adapt new methods and processes in the organization is effected badly as stressful employees cannot learn the things quickly.

## 7.2 Organizational consequences of Stress

Not only individuals are affected by stress but organizations too are affected as a result of stress and have to bear a cost of it also in many forms. The stress impact on teams in the organization can damage:

- The work performance of an employee
- The overall performance of the employees as a team
- Interpersonal relationships at workplace
- Employee's cooperation spirit.
- Increased absenteeism



- Stressed workers lack motivation to come to work or may not feel well enough to come to work, which results in an increase in the number of workers not showing up for work on any given day
- Lack of commitment in the work
- A cost to company arises in the form of health care that arise due to increased illness, accidents, and disease caused by or related to stress
- Performance decreases as the tendency to involve less in the work increases and thereby decreased productivity
- Job dissatisfaction
- Customer not satisfied, increased complaints from customers
- Staff or employees may be interested in leaving the companies and joining somewhere else
- Employee may not be able to cope with the pressure and finding himself physically unfit and may choose to resign
- A legal action may be taken against the company by stressed employees and
- Employees Stress can also negatively affect company's image internally as well as externally.

## 8. Management of Stress / Stress Coping Mechanisms

Stress management refers to the wide spectrum of techniques and psychotherapies aimed at controlling a person's levels of stress, especially chronic stress, usually for the purpose of improving everyday functioning. The link between stress and coping is an inevitable feature of the human condition. Coping means dealing with stressors to eliminate; reduce, or to minimize their harmful consequences.

### 8.1 COMPONENTS OF COPING

**8.1.1 Biological Component:** When an individual encounters a threat or challenge, his/her body triggers separate responses.

- Message goes from the brain to adrenal medulla through the sympathetic nervous system to secrete catecholamine's to prepare for fight or flight response increasing the blood flow, pulse rate, breathing rate, and sweat gland activity.
- Hypothalamus is stimulated to produce and send Corticotrophin Releasing Factor (CRF) through the blood veins to the pituitary gland to adrenal cortex that secretes cortisol hormone to bring down stress levels and restore normalcy. Cortisol is a very potent hormone.

**8.1.2 Cognitive Component:** This represents the mental process of appraising the situation by the individual. **Primary Appraisal-** This appraisal is done to evaluate the significance of the potential stressor (as relevant or irrelevant, controllable or uncontrollable, positive or negative, challenging or stressful) after which the potential stressor becomes a real stressor or it gets dissipated. **Secondary Appraisal-** Secondary appraisal is done only if a potential stressor is not dissipated after the primary appraisal and is converted as a real stressor. **Learned Component:** Learning from own or other's experience, through education, training, experiential reinforcement or otherwise influences coping to deal with the stress.

## 8.2 METHODS OF COPING

**8.2.1 Cognitive Coping Strategies:** We can cope with a stressor or our emotion by problem solving, self talk, and appraisal.

**8.2.2 Behavioral coping Strategies:** A person also responds to stress behaviorally. There are four general classes of behavioral responses to stress. Seeking information, direct action, and, inhibition action, and turning to others.

**8.2.3 Problem-Focused Coping Strategies:** It aims at managing or changing a stressful situation by Confrontive Coping or Planful Problem-Solving.

**8.2.4 Emotion-Focused Coping Strategies:** It aims at regulating the psychological response to a potential stressor or stressful event for minimizing their harmful consequences by changing how the individual concerned thinks about them. Few such strategies are stated below:

- **Escape–Avoidance:** The individual concerned escapes from negative emotions by avoiding a potential stressor or stressful situation.
- **Distancing:** The individual concerned tries to distance himself/herself from the potential stressor or stressful situation.
- **Denial:** The individual concerned denies the very existence of problems resulting in stress.
- **Adaptive Coping:** The individual concerned attempts to minimize the negative impact of a potential stressor or stressful situation while creating a positive meaning for himself / herself, focusing on personal achievement and growth.

**8.2.5 Functional Coping Strategies** are positive strategies for managing stress as they provide lasting solutions for handling potential stressors or stressful situations, while promoting individual well being and effectiveness.

**8.2.6 Dysfunctional Coping Strategies** are negative strategies for managing stress as they provide only temporary relief from stressful encounters. In the long run they are harmful for the individual.

**8.2.7 Proactive Coping Strategies** are modern and forward-looking. Proactive coping strategy involves anticipating potential stressors and acting in advance to prevent them or to minimize their adverse influence.

**8.2.8 Reactive Coping Strategies** are traditional coping strategies, dealing with stress after it has occurred. They are aimed at minimizing the harm and loss created by stress.

### 8.3 STRESS COPING MECHANISMS

#### 8.3.1 Individual Stress Coping Mechanisms

Individual stress management includes a training to be given through education and employee assistance programs to deal with the stress. In such programs workers are taught about nature and sources of stress, its effects, and the use of personal skills to help them reduce and manage their stress. The various individual stress management mechanisms are:

- Time Management and following time schedule for activities
- Physical Management includes physical exercises
- Psychological Management includes relaxation through meditation
- Behavioral Self Control through self introspection, correct perception, etc.
- Yoga Learning
- Social Approach that involves time spending with family and friends
- Self Awareness Approach focuses on knowing ones weaknesses and strengths

#### 8.4 Organizational Stress Coping Mechanisms

Each individual needs a moderate amount of stress to be alert and capable of functioning. At organisational levels, stress levels of employees can be reduced by actually, giving them the job as per their capabilities and skills. A total removal of stress is impossible at workplace, rather, certain amount of stress is desired to be active and work properly. The following stress coping mechanisms can be adopted by the organisation:

- Selection and Placement- The matching of the job with individual's qualification etc.
- Goal Achievements- Target must be clearly set
- Ambiguous Role- Define roles/position clearly in the organisation
- Communication and Counselling
- Career Planning and Guidance
- Organisational Structure and Climate- Clearly stated policies, rules and regulations
- Welfare Programs
- Management of Functioning
- Undertaking Stress Audit
- Employee Assistance Programme
- Stress Management Training Programme
- Stress Reduction Intervention Programmes

### Summary

- Stress arises when we perceive ourselves as not able to cope with the situation. Stress is any kind of demand due to which behavioral changes occur in a person. These demands may be environmental or individual.
- Stress is different from pressure. Some amount of pressure is required to get the things done but if pressure is for long time and an individual is unable to cope with it, then stress arises, therefore, pressure is in the situation and stress is in the person. In simple words, higher the demands and incapability to fulfil those demands is a reason for stress.
- The implications of stress can be in the form of physical, social, psychological, and behavioural.
- There are many methods and approaches to coping and managing stress depending on the source activated and the interface between these sources and the individual. It is the individual employee that must develop his own coping strategy to combat stress.

- Inefficient stress acts as a depressant and may leave simply 'RUSTOUT'.
- On the other hand, greater stress levels may leave up feeling 'tied up in knots' or 'BURNOUT'. The need is to have an optimal level of stress and maintain life and work styles to avoid 'rusting out' as well as 'burning out'.
- Our goal should not be to eliminate stress but learn how to manage stress and use it to help us.