

STRESS: Let us manage her!

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Abstract

The paper attempts to analyze various factors that generate stress, in the routine social life of Pakistani nation in general and at work place in particular, causing psychological disorder and eroding productivity level. The ultimate aim of this diagnostic study is to recommend measures how the stress can be reduced and professional productivity can be enhanced.

Stress on human mind is associated with the environment in which the human being exists. Stress refers to the broad class of human problems. It deals with any demands, which tax the body system, as well as the response of that system. Factors, which are potentially stressors, are either external or internal to the individual. External factors can be such as heat, cold, noise etceteras where as internal factors can be either physiological or psychological. Recognition of these stressors is very important for subsequent stress management.

In Pakistan this is relatively an obscure subject, which has received only cursory attention. We do agree that our educational, social, working and financial environments are entirely different from the west, but we wish to focus on the individuals to deliver hundred percent. But the irony of the fact is that the stress as a negative factor has never been recognized at our national or organizational setting and we are passing through a state of

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apathy in this regard. The study found that neither at the conceptual nor at the practical level, any serious effort is made or formal education given to our people (as well as employees) thus they are not aware and even understand this important battle winning factor.

Stress is a widely known and used word. Tension is another alternative used for it, in every sense of the word. There will be two broad stepping stones of this construct. Step one, exploring what is stress, and second suggesting and recommending the strategies to manage it.

Here we go about shaking hand with stress.

The unit called man is the focus and hub of other sub-systems of stress. It is the person who is the rider clause (don't understand this) and influencing all the rest, directly or indirectly.

The next sub-system is environment or the work environment. Some environments are stressful, some enjoyable and rest range in between on a wide continuum. These environments exist for a period of time. The change between two extremes is taking place all the time. Almost unsolvable complexity occurs when under the same circumstances two individuals report back exactly opposite of each other. One crying out it is stressful, while the other declaring it enjoyable. It could be a sense of being on top of the world, for one, while the other shivering from height phobia with eyes closed. It could be fear of freezing to death for one, while the other screaming out to the world, look I have conquered K2. For one it could be eardrum bursting and for other world class rock music.

Next factor could be a matter of lifestyle. Taking birth in a cell attached to the shrine of Shah Kamal, a church or synagogue and spending rest of life in mass, from courtyard to altar, and cemetery to graveyard and back, is one lifestyle. The other is that of a stunt man, moving from snake pits to shark's

company, from car jumps to horse fall demonstration and from free fall to nails being hammered in the skin. Of course one can list many more sensational vocations.

The next factor and the last in this regard is choices. The matter of choices, how many, in which situation and who has it, will decide the choice of type and degree of stress one wishes to live with. Some individuals have lot of choices and in almost all aspects of life. For some, however, neither there is variety in role nor very many choices. In other words, things are very tight and all ready-made for them by the providence. For this category of people it is He who knows every thing, they are but a robot. Even they do not know what they would eat at dinner. And they feel they are floating like a piece of cork over the surface of water, may it be in a glass, ocean, river or a pond. And yet He would adjudge the man and punish, Ah!

All above was one way to shake hand with stress. Let us look at its two sub-categories now. Namely, these are distress and u-stress.

Distress is the bad stress. Choosing between distress and u-stress is also a matter of choice, to some extent; of course not always. Distress is a hard, painful fact. Distress in its extreme could mean a suicide or an attempt to murder. Therefore, the issue has to be addressed with full commitment and concern. Here it is an attempt to learn about it.

You and Your Capacity: How do you estimate your capacity? May be you think you can walk just a kilometer and distance ahead is ten kilometer plus. You can lift twenty kilograms and fifty kg has been placed on your shoulders. As a father or a mother you have been put to test by a special child. Oh! How to cope with it? A broken house of a child, especially of a girl....how can one bear with it. The loss in last business transaction was only half a million, not a big deal. One more consignment

sent and the loss will be history. The gap between the estimated capacity and the task at hand or the challenge faced with will cause distress.

Hopelessness and Helplessness: When and which situation becomes hopeless and one feels helpless; the seed rests well deep below the skin. May be it is written in genome. That could be the reason that every now and then you and your case turns into a hopeless situation. Some parallels can run as follows. The kind of spouse I have been tied up with, no way; too hopeless. My father was a pauper, how could I be given good education, he neither had any links to push me into a good job; obviously how could he marry me with a rich and a beautiful girl; Ah I feel helpless.

No rules and no Justice: Lawlessness, weak and shifting rules, differential treatment and where justice can be bought, causes distress. The examples can be found all around. You could not get the NOC for your CNG station project. Nor do you know the current rate of bribery and neither the right person to bribe. You can not get your sweet baby son, into the school next door. The types of tests they hold can not be passed by your son and neither by you as parents. There is only one more school in the town and you can not pay the exuberant fees. There is no way to get justice in the enquiry underway against you in your office. The chairman is indeed a party, behind the doors. What to do, where to go!

Uncontrollable: Every one needs sugar, electricity and gas, and at affordable prices. Neither the availability is within control or the prices. For some waistline and increasing weight is out of control. The delays in the marriage timings and other ceremonies are sickening. It appears to be out of everybody's control. Corruption in government corridors of all sorts and categories is uncontrollable. Those responsible to arrest it are lurking deep in it. So are the gold rates, out of control. Well how can I close this list of uncontrollable, without failing to count twenty, I repeat, twenty drone

attacks by USA forces in October 2010. All uncontrollable variables cause distress.

Cluttered up: When things fly in and out and without any order the situation is called cluttered up. A mind is cluttered up when ideas are jumbled and disjointed. Same can be the situation on a study desk, kitchen, office table or washroom. Cluttering causes distress, since it causes loss of direction, loss of order and arrangements to proceed further. Our national scene, presents a good example.

Lack of challenge: Lack of challenge means lacking a point of focus. This could result in a lack of purpose and consequently lack of direction. Overwhelming void results into not knowing what to do and when to do. All this would get intertwined to cause distress.

Shortage of Time: Some people are always suffering from shortage of time. Sometimes it is perceived, sometimes it is real. It could be a packed up engine leading to a forced landing or merely a fussy mother pushing all of her children to finish the *sehri* for a perceived fear of shortage of time. Some mismanage the time and therefore, run short of time. A stitch out of time again causes distress. However, more than mistiming or a stroke at wrong time, it is the shortage of time which is the source of distress.

Feedback: Waiting for feedback or the outcome of an examination or an interview is another cause of distress. Waiting for a medical laboratory report is an equally testing time. Waiting for award of contract falls in the same category. All these are the potent reasons for distress.

Here I will enumerate all the above points, generating and contributing towards distress; you and your capacity, hopelessness and helplessness, no rule and no justice, uncontrollable developments, cluttering, lack of challenge, shortage of time and lack of feedback. Reviewing this summary you may find your cause of distress. It may also tell how more than one of

these has combined to cause distress. A deeper study may help reveal some solutions as well.

Now I move to discuss the second subtype of stress; it is called **u-stress**. Another name for u-stress is good stress. This is also a gap, a gap between now and then, a gap between 'is' and 'ought to be'. This disparity fortunately generates 'pull'; a prime mover to ensure desired results. Let us see its contributing factors.

Happy Tidings: The phrase *naziran wa basheera* has been used very frequently in Quran e karim with reference to the role and responsibilities of the prophets. The *basheera* means the one who is to give or announce and promulgate happy tidings. An incentive that is the promise of a reward creates a pull. It is akin to a life insurance policy. For the sake of promised maturity date and life risk coverage one keeps giving the premium.

Hope of Profit in Business: The hope of gains creates u-stress. The impending chances of gains and profit in a business deal pull the decision-maker to take risks. It is said in business, no risk no gains. Whether the hopes are intrinsic or extrinsic, and where the fear of risk overtakes is a subsidiary discussion. Pinning a hope starts working to generate options. More options means greater number of choices to make a better decision. Then there is an effort to execute and implement the decision in the most perfect manner, possible. That is how u-stress keeps influencing all along.

Internalized Goals: Where lays the foci of success and loss, within or outside an individual? What is the level of ownership of the goals set forth, are these fully owned or partially or totally forced upon? Only a high grade u-stress causes a burning desire to attain the goals, and to have that, goals must be internalized. Previous experience of success is a great reinforcement for u-stress.

Choices to Fight out or Escape:

Obviously one choice would lead to good stress while the other to bad. It is the u-stress which will make one to stand up, even in the most trying and challenging conditions. U-stress causes a series of thinking process; S—R, R—S relationships, onto exhibited behavior, all intertwined.

Now all the above sub-heads are summarized here before proceeding forward. These are: happy tidings, hope of gains, internalized goals and fighting back and out. Which one do you experience the most? Yes, there could be other categories as well.

The last part of this study deals with the strategies to handle distress. The approach will be three fold. A bit of philosophy of life, if you are the one who loves to draw, see and understand mega picture. Some short term methods and procedure and some fads.

Be a Man: To me this is the number one solution. Be a ‘man’. It is to know yourself. And the best way to know a product is to ask its manufacturer. So conduct a focused, objective and sincere effort of self-discovery. Explore yourself. Establish your identity. Some corner stones of this exercise are suggested below.

Man as a mankind is the best of His creation: He Himself answered to His angles, the then best creation, you do not know what I know, I am going to appoint this new creation as my vicegerent. The event was launching of our father’s father, Adam, *darood o salaam* upon him. So I am son of a prophet, like all of you! Any doubt; see 49:13 Quran.

- He is the owner, the giver, the taker, the beginning, the end and knows everything; 57:1-3 Quran. Verily we have honored the children of Adam...17:70 Quran. He has subjected rest all for the service of mankind, 45: 12-13, Quran. Step out therefore, you, the supreme creature and struggle for self-actualization. Yes, you will

be adjudged, 76:2 Quran, so get ready, and get going, do not waste time under distress.

- Everything belongs to Him, like your pay slip, your wife, your son, daughter and all in your possession. All your gains, attainments and achievements are due to Him; so say *Allaho Akbar*, (Allah is great). For all you failed to achieve say *Al-hamdo lillah* (All praises for Him). The disillusion and disappointment due to failures should minimize. Yes, feel sorry for not having made enough effort, if this was the reason, and then learn how to do it the next time, if you get another chance.

Let me insert a thumb rule here. They are 4 As:

- Avoid the stressor.
- Alter the stressor.
- Adapt the stressor.
- Accept the stressor.

Let us examine each one of above, in brief.

Avoid the stressor: Avoiding the stressor, placed atop does not mean you have to follow that like a cooking recipe. Any one or any combination of these As can rescue and produce stupendous results. Let us see the instructions, step wise

- **Learn how to say no.** No to a potential stressor and stressing situation.
- **Learn to avoid a situation about to arise.** The start point could be avoiding a location or a topic.

- **Try to take control of your environments.** Identify which part or sub-part causes stress. If you can, avoid it, or eliminate it, or at least minimize it, do something.
- **Avoid hot button topics.** One way is to respect other's opinion. Know and learn the difference between facts and opinion.
- **Enjoy your right of being wrong.** Every one makes mistakes. Remember cowards make the least. All have same right of being wrong, why only you?
- **Cut down your daily to do list.** Please do make one if you are not in a habit of making one.

Alter the situation. How to do that?

- Do not bottle up your feelings. With the due permission of recipient and the listeners express your opinion or correction in any of the facts.
- Be willing to compromise on a rebuttal. Every one has the right to be right. And why **you** must be right **always**. It is walking a tight rope, by itself.
- Manage your time. Do not suffer the self created problem of shortage of time. It is easy, try and practice making an estimate of time to be consumed on each event, for next two to four hours ahead. You may work forward or backwards. Use of a paper and pencil can do wonders. My dear lady readers, may you please read last three sentences again.

Adapt to the stressor. Difficult option, but it is you who have to decide between the perpetual distress and a happier future.

- Redefine the problem if you have defined it before; ever. Some of us just never go through the exercise of defining the problem or reframing the problem. A million dollar question, do you really know what the problem is. It may help you **solving** the problem or adapting the stressor.
- Know and learn the other's logic bubble. Why he or she is behaving **the** way.... If you can get out of reactive mode and have the courage and bravery to look at the bigger picture you will be able to manage to **cope** up with the stressor.
- Losing a battle may help you win a war.
- Adjust your standards. Why be a perfectionist? And why not review other's standards and way of working, for learning new ways and seeking objectivity.
- Know the difference between effective and efficient. Prefer to be effective with human beings rather efficient.

Accept the things you can not change. If one can not does it then tussle and conflict is the perpetual state, to live in.

- **Establish the context of a situation.** Within a certain limits of time, location and factors; a few things would always be uncontrollable. Remember you are one of the factors, of the process, of an event or happening. Know **these** uncontrollable and accept **them**; as **they are**. Think of a traffic jam. Rest of the people and vehicles are not there to tease you, you are one of the **factors** and **characters** of this process and event. There is no rush and jam half a kilometer away; neither it was, an hour earlier. And it would be all gone an hour later. And above all, you came here by your own choice. So relax, and accept 'uncontrollable' and give a smile to the

steaming, frowning and foaming driver across your car window. Take this example and draw analogy with life situations elsewhere.

- **Pay attention to controllable.** Remember the line between controllable and uncontrollable *varies* from person to person, position and assignment and depends on the rate of growth, of a person. The list is never absolute. *The* important point is to pay attention to *the* controllable.

Have time for fun and relaxation

- Learn to ‘breathe your troubles out’. It is a definite exercise. You can combine it with your daily walk or else.
 - Go for a walk, daily or at least five times a week. Spend sometime with nature. *Time* spent on treadmill *will have to be added* to the time *to be* spent with nature. Plants, pets and river side all are part of nature.
 - Make a list of friends to be called every week or daily. Try to give them something. A special joke for *especial* one.
 - Plan a workout and or a sweat out. How about gardening?
 - Have a stress journal. Let it have it. Give your piece of mind to pages of stress journal, all what others do not take from you. Call it pillow book or give it any funny name.

Adopt a healthy lifestyle. Here is a total sum, to shape a lifestyle.

- Help some one. Many more are helpless than you, they need you. You will enjoy and in the process explore your strengths.
- Eat all, when you are hungry, and offer others before biting. Do not run after taste and items of food. Do not mix different foods at any one meal. Do not be choosy and on medicines till you are sick.

- Reduce caffeine and sugar. No alcohol, cigarettes and drugs.
- Be tired of work before you go to sleep. Night is meant for to sleep. And no compromise on the adequate quota of sleep hours.
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Do not look for a conclusion, all has been said, for the time and space at hand. Read between the lines where there is a gap. Still you want me to conclude, fine, then 'be a man'.

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