

Module-6

stress and community health. Definition and nature , Type of stressors, stress appraisal , coping with stress, psychological moderators of stress (Hardiness, social support and optimism)

Meaning and Definition of Stress

- **Definition of Stress**

- Stress refers to the **physical, psychological, and emotional response of an individual to demands or pressures (stressors) that disturb the individual's equilibrium.**
- Several psychologists have defined stress:
- **Hans Selye (1956):**
Stress is the **non-specific response of the body to any demand placed upon it.**
- **Richard Lazarus and Susan Folkman (1984):**
Stress is a relationship between the individual and the environment that is appraised by the individual as taxing or exceeding their resources and endangering well-being.
- **Sarafino (Health Psychology):**
Stress is a condition that results when a person perceives that the demands of a situation exceed their personal and social resources.

Stress in Community Health

- In community health, stress is viewed as a major psychosocial factor influencing physical health, mental health, and quality of life in populations.

Stress can contribute to:

- Heart disease
- Hypertension
- Depression
- Anxiety disorders
- Substance abuse
- Weakened immune system
- Community health professionals study stress because social conditions

Nature of Stress

Stress has several important characteristics.

1. Stress is a Psychological and Physiological Process

- Stress affects both:

Psychological aspects

- Anxiety
- Irritability
- Emotional distress

Physiological aspects

- Increased heart rate
- Increased blood pressure

2. Stress Involves Interaction Between Person and Environment

Stress occurs when there is **imbalance between environmental demands and personal resources**.

Example:

- Heavy workload
- Lack of time
- Financial difficulties

If a person feels unable to cope → stress occurs.

3. Stress is Not Always Negative

- Stress can be **positive or negative**.

Type	Meaning
Eustress	Positive stress that motivates performance
Distress	Negative stress that harms health

4. Stress is Subjective

The same situation may produce **different levels of stress for different individuals**.

Example:

- Public speaking may be stressful for one person but exciting for another.

5. Stress Can be Acute or Chronic

Acute Stress

- Short-term
- Example: exam, interview

Chronic Stress

- Long-term
- Example: poverty, marital conflict, job insecurity

Chronic stress is **more harmful to health**.

3. Types of Stressors

Stressor

A **stressor is any event, condition, or stimulus that causes stress.**

Stressors can be classified into several types.

• **1. Environmental Stressors**

• These arise from the **physical environment.**

• Examples:

• Noise pollution

• Extreme temperature

• Natural disasters

• Air pollution

2. Life Event Stressors

Major life changes that require **psychological adjustment.**

Examples:

• Death of a loved one

• Divorce

• Marriage

• Job loss

• Moving to a new place

Holmes and Rahe developed the **Social Readjustment Rating Scale (SRRS)** to measure stress caused by life events.

3. Daily Hassles

Small everyday problems that accumulate and produce stress.

- Examples:
- Traffic jams
- Work deadlines
- Family conflicts
- Financial worries

Research shows **daily hassles may produce more stress than major life events.**

4. Occupational Stressors

Stress that occurs in the workplace.

- Examples:
- Heavy workload
- Job insecurity
- Role conflict
- Lack of control
- Poor supervision

Occupational stress is linked with:

- Burnout
- Job dissatisfaction

5. Social Stressors

These arise from **social relationships and social environment**.

- Examples:
- Discrimination
- Social isolation
- Family conflict
- Community violence
- Poverty
- These stressors are especially important in **community health psychology**.

6. Catastrophic Events

Large-scale disasters affecting many people.

- Examples:
- Earthquakes
- Floods
- War
- Terrorism
- Pandemics
- These events produce **severe psychological stress and trauma**.

4. Stress Appraisal (Lazarus and Folkman Model)

- According to **Lazarus and Folkman (1984)**, stress depends on how a person **interprets or appraises a situation**.
- Stress appraisal involves two stages.

1. Primary Appraisal

- In primary appraisal, the individual evaluates **whether the situation is threatening or not**.
- Three possible outcome

Type	Meaning
Irrelevant	Situation has no impact
Benign-positive	Situation is positive
Stressful	Situation threatens well-being

Stressful situations may be perceived as:

- **Harm/Loss** – damage already done
- **Threat** – potential future damage
- **Challenge** – opportunity for growth

Example:

Exam situation

Student A → sees exam as challenge

Student B → sees exam as threat

2. Secondary Appraisal

In secondary appraisal, the individual evaluates:

“Do I have the resources to cope with this situation?”

Resources include:

- Skills
- Knowledge
- Money
- Social support
- Time

If resources are insufficient → stress increases.

- **Reappraisal**

5. Coping with Stress

Definition of Coping

According to Lazarus and Folkman:

Coping refers to **constantly changing cognitive and behavioral efforts to manage internal and external demands that are perceived as stressful.**

Types of Coping

1. Problem-Focused Coping

- This approach attempts to **change or eliminate the source of stress.**
- Examples:
 - Time management
 - Seeking information
 - Making a plan

2. Emotion-Focused Coping

- This approach focuses on **reducing emotional distress rather than changing the situation.**
- Examples:
 - Relaxation techniques
 - Meditation
 - Talking to friends
 - Distraction
 - Positive thinking
- Example:
 - Listening to music to reduce anxiety.

3. Avoidance Coping

Trying to **avoid or ignore the stressor**.

Examples:

- Denial
- Substance use
- Escaping from problem

This strategy may reduce stress temporarily but **often leads to negative outcomes**.

4. Meaning-Focused Coping

This involves **finding positive meaning in stressful situations**.

Examples:

- Personal growth
- Spiritual beliefs
- Positive reinterpretation

6. Psychological Moderators of Stress

Psychological moderators are **personal characteristics that influence how people respond to stress.**

Important moderators include:

1. Hardiness
2. Social Support
3. Optimism

1 Hardiness

Definition

Hardiness is a **personality characteristic that helps individuals resist the harmful effects of stress.**

Concept introduced by **Suzanne Kobasa (1979).**

Hardy individuals view stressful events as **less threatening and more manageable.**

Components of Hardiness

- Hardiness consists of three components called “3 Cs”.

Component	Meaning
Commitment	Active involvement in life activities
Control	Belief that one can influence events
Challenge	Viewing change as opportunity

Effects of Hardiness

Hardiness helps individuals:

- Interpret stress as challenge
- Use effective coping strategies
- Maintain psychological well-being
- Reduce risk of illness

Research shows hardy individuals have **lower levels of stress-related illness**.

Social Support

Social support refers to **the emotional, informational, and practical assistance provided by family, friends, and community.**

Social support acts as a **buffer against stress.**

Type	Meaning
Emotional Support	Love, care, empathy
Informational Support	Advice, guidance
Instrumental Support	Practical help (money, services)
Appraisal Support	Feedback and evaluation

Benefits of Social Support

Research shows social support:

- Reduces stress
- Improves mental health
- Enhances coping ability
- Decreases risk of depression
- Improves physical health

Communities with strong social networks show **better health outcomes.**

Optimism

Definition

Optimism is the **general expectation that good things will happen in the future.**

Optimism was studied by **Carver and Scheier.**

• **Characteristics of Optimistic Individuals**

- Optimistic people tend to:
- Expect positive outcomes
- Persist during difficulties
- Use active coping strategies
- Maintain hope

Effects of Optimism on Stress

Optimism helps individuals:

- Interpret stressful events positively
- Use problem-focused coping
- Maintain motivation
- Recover faster from illness

Research shows optimism is associated with:

- Better mental health
- Lower stress levels
- Better immune functioning

Conclusion

Stress is an important psychological factor that influences **both individual and community health**. Stress arises from multiple sources including environmental, social, occupational, and personal stressors. The impact of stress depends on how individuals **appraise and cope with stressful situations**.

Psychological moderators such as **hardiness, social support, and optimism help individuals manage stress more effectively**, thereby improving mental and physical health. Understanding stress and coping mechanisms is essential for **promoting community health and well-being**.