Stress

- Robert Sapolsky studying baboons in Kenya
  - social order includes dominant males being terrible and abusive to non-dominant
  - non-dominant show higher levels of stress hormone cortisol in bloodstream: chronic stress
  - associated with poor health outcomes, like heart disease, lowered immune response, etc – in HUMANS AND BABOONS

- Humans: stress response is not momentary like for most animals (aside from baboons), but chronic: money, work, family as stressors

Stress

- Which is worse?
  - vacation OR death of spouse
  - jail term OR being fired
  - retirement OR pregnancy/birth of child
### Social Readjustment Rating Scale (SRRS, 1967)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Life Event</th>
<th>LCU</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>death of spouse</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>divorce</td>
<td>73</td>
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<tr>
<td>marital separation</td>
<td>65</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>jail term</td>
<td>63</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>death of close family member</td>
<td>63</td>
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<tr>
<td>personal injury or illness</td>
<td>53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>marriage</td>
<td>50</td>
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<tr>
<td>being fired</td>
<td>47</td>
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<tr>
<td>retirement</td>
<td>45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>pregnancy</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>change in financial state</td>
<td>38</td>
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<tr>
<td>more arguments with spouse</td>
<td>35</td>
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<tr>
<td>change in work responsibilities</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>child leaving home</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>beginning/ending school</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>change in eating habits</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>vacation</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Christmas</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Health, Stress & Coping

- **Stress**: the process of adjusting to or dealing with circumstances that disrupt, or threaten to disrupt, the course of a person’s physical or psychological functioning
Psychological Stressors

- frustrating & pressured situations
- daily hassles & conflict
- life changes & strains
- chronic stress
- catastrophic events
- boredom

Issues in Stress Research

- Universality
- Predictability
- Clear remedies
- What influences the stress process
Stress Research Methodology

• Limited to studying stress in naturally occurring environments (for ethical reasons!)
• Types of stress measures:
  – Self-report
    • Social Readjustment Rating Scale (SRRS)
      – measures stress in Life Change Units (LCUs)
    • Life Experiences Survey (LES)
      – measures stress as perception of how intensely neg/pos events were
    • daily hassles
  – Behavioral
  – Physiological/Biochemical

Stress Responses

• **Physical**: General Adaptation Syndrome
  – **Alarm stage**
    • e.g., increased respiration, heart rate and blood pressure
  – **Resistance stage**
    • increased production of steroids
  – **Exhaustion stage**
    • final rallying of defenses (similar to alarm stage), followed by death/breakdown
• Psychological
  – emotional (e.g., anxiety, depression)
  – cognitive
  • loss of memory, difficulty concentrating
  • catastrophizing … dwelling on potential outcomes
• Behavioral
  – strained facial expressions, shaky voice, posture change
  – aggression
• Burnout & PTSD
Stress Mediators

Stress Mediators

Stressor

Stress Mediator

Stress Response

Stress Response
Mediator: Cognitive Appraisal

Stressor → Primary Appraisal
- challenge → no "stress"
- threat

Primary Appraisal
- "stress" → Secondary Appraisal
- can't cope
- can cope

Secondary Appraisal
- "stress" → can't cope
- can cope

Other Stress Mediators

- Social Support
- Personality
  - Hardiness
    - similar to locus of control (internal vs. external)
  - Negative affectivity
  - Type A behavior
    - (Twice as likely to suffer from heart disease)
“Prescription” for Stress
(AKA, How to make yourself a complete basket case in Three Easy Steps!)

• Remember that worry is essential
  • No important task can be undertaken without it.
  • Tell yourself: If you’re not worrying, if things are going smoothly, if life seems easy, you’re doing something wrong.

• Over-identify with everyone in your life.
  • When they get upset, be sure that you get upset. Absorb their worries and make them your own.
  • Do this with friends, co-workers, and family.
  • Also with the starving people of the world.

• Remind yourself constantly: Life ought to be perfect.
  • Anything less is failure.
  • When something goes right, quickly remind yourself of all the things that are (or could go) wrong.