

TRANSACTIONAL MODEL OF STRESS

CC-10 (Health Psychology) Unit 2; SEM III

By

Prof. (Dr.) Md. Iftekhhar Hossain,
Head of Department, P.G Department of Psychology
Patna University

Contact No-993408701,

[E-mail-iftekharpupatna786@gmail.com](mailto:iftekharpupatna786@gmail.com)

The transactional model of stress

The role of appraisal

- In the 1970s, Lazarus's work on stress introduced psychology to understanding the stress response. This role for psychology took the form of his concept of appraisal.
- Lazarus argued that stress involved a transaction between the individual and their external world, and that a stress response was elicited if the individual appraised a potentially stressful event as actually being stressful.
- Lazarus's model of appraisal therefore described individuals as psychological beings who appraised the outside world, not simply passively responding to it.

Lazarus defined two forms of appraisal:
Primary and
Secondary.

According to Lazarus, the individual initially appraises the event itself - defined as primary appraisal.

There are four possible ways that the event can be appraised:

1. (1) Benign
2. positive;
3. (3) Harmful and a threat;
4. (4) Harmful and a challenge.

Secondary appraisal involves the individual evaluating the pros and cons of their different coping strategies.

Primary appraisal involves an appraisal of the outside world and secondary appraisal involves an appraisal of the individual themselves.

The primary and secondary appraisals determines whether the individual shows a stress response or not.

According to Lazarus's model this stress response can take different forms:

- (1) Direct action;
- (2) Seeking information;
- (3) Doing nothing; or
- (4) Developing a means of coping with the stress in terms of relaxation or defence mechanisms.

STUDIES

Several studies have examined the effect of appraisal on stress and have evaluated the role of the psychological state of the individual on their stress response.

Speisman et al. (1964), subjects were shown a film depicting an initiation ceremony involving unpleasant genital surgery. The film was shown with three different soundtracks.

In condition 1, the trauma condition, the soundtrack emphasized the pain and the mutilation.

In condition 2, the denial condition, the soundtrack showed the participants as being willing and happy.

In condition 3, the intellectualization condition, the soundtrack gave an anthropological interpretation of the ceremony. The study therefore manipulated the subjects' appraisal of the situation and evaluated the effect of the type of appraisal on their stress response.

Results showed that subjects reported that the trauma condition was most stressful. This suggests that it is not the events themselves that elicit stress, but the individuals' interpretation or appraisal of those events.

Repetti (1993) assessed the objective stressors (e.g. weather conditions, congestion) and subjective stressors (e.g. perceived stress) experienced by air traffic controllers and reported that both objective and subjective stressors independently predicted both minor illnesses and psychological distress. This could indicate that either appraisal is not always necessary or that at times individuals do not acknowledge their level of subjective stress.

In line with this possibility some researchers have identified 'repressors' as a group of individuals who use selective inattention and forgetting to avoid stressful information (Roth and Cohen 1986). Such people show incongruence between their physiological state and their level of reported anxiety.

Event more likely to result in a stress response than others are

■Salient events- People often function in many different domains such as work, family and friends. For one person, work might be more salient, while for another their family life might be more important. Swindle and Moos (1992) argued that stressors in salient domains of life are more stressful than those in more peripheral domains.

■Overload- Multitasking seems to result in more stress than the chance to focus on fewer tasks at any one time. Therefore a single stressor which adds to a background of other stressors will be appraised as more stressful than when the same stressor occurs in isolation- commonly known as the straw that broke the camel's back.

- Ambiguous events- If an event is clearly defined then the person can efficiently develop a coping strategy. If, however, the event is ambiguous and unclear then the person first has to spend time and energy considering what coping strategy is best. This is reflected in the work stress literature which illustrates that poor job control and role ambiguity in the workplace often result in a stress response.
- Uncontrollable events- If a stressor can be predicted and controlled then it is usually appraised as less stressful than a more random uncontrollable event. For example, experimental studies show that unpredictable loud bursts of noise are more stressful than predictable ones.