Stress and Burnout
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APA Survey, 2/15/2017, (n:1,109)

- Americans rated their stress at 5.1 on a 10 point scale, the first significant increase in 10 years.
- 49% were stressed about the outcome of the presidential election, 57% said they were stressed about the current political climate, 66% were stressed about the future of the USA.

APA Survey (cont)

- 59% of Republicans and 76% of Democrats were stressed about the future.
- The number of people who were stressed about personal safety, acts of terrorism, police violence, and general personal safety also reached the highest percentage since 2008.
Stress

• Mild stress is good for the brain by increasing levels of brain derived neurotrophic factor (BDNF). Children exposed to mild/moderate stress are better able to cope with stress as adults.

• However, 50-75% of routine medical practice is devoted to complaints related to stress. Problems at work are more strongly associated with health complaints than any other life stressor. Healthcare expenditures are 50% greater for workers who report high levels of stress (J of Occ Env Med, 1998)

Stress Response: LC/NE Pathway

• LC/NE: The locus coeruleus (LC) secretes norepinephrine (NE - related to adrenaline) in the cortex, thalamus, limbic system, hypothalamus, spinal cord. NE acts as a neuromodulator. It also activates the autonomic nervous system for fight or flight. Heart rate, respiration, and blood pressure increase.

Stress Response: HPA Axis

• Hypothalamic: When stress is perceived, corticotropin-releasing hormone (CRH) and vasopressin are secreted by neurons in the hypothalamus. CRH causes the pituitary to secrete ACTH. ACTH stimulates the adrenal gland to release cortisol which increases glucose levels and suppresses the inflammatory/immune response. This is the hypothalamus-pituitary adrenal axis (HPA.)
Cortisol

- The levels of glucocorticoids in the blood typically follow a daily rhythm - high early in the morning, low later in the day. They increase glucose in the blood, control its metabolism, and regulate the sleep wake cycle.
- High levels of cortisol have many deleterious effects on the body (Cushing’s disease).

Stress and Weight

- In the short term, corticotropin-releasing hormone and epinephrine suppress appetite. Longer term, however, cortisol increases appetite and ramps up the motivation to eat.
- Animals under stress prefer high fat, high sugar diets. There is some evidence that these foods may then reduce the stress response to some extent – “comfort foods.”

Stress: Memory Effects

-Immediately, cortisol enhances memory. If the stress precedes the event, or happens a considerable time afterward, or if the stress is chronic or repetitive, cortisol suppresses the processing of new information.
- High levels of glucocorticoids lead to impaired memory and neuronal cell death.
- Cortisol dissolves the brain.
Common Physical Symptoms of Stress
- Headache
- Back, shoulder, neck pain
- Sleep problems
- Difficulty concentrating
- GI problems
- Palpitations
- Skin problems
- Tics
- Low energy

Common Emotional Symptoms of Stress
- Job dissatisfaction
- Burnout
- Irritability
- Anxiety
- Depression
- Isolation, withdrawal

Telomeres
- In 1965 scientists reported that the older a person is, the fewer times his cells divide when cultured in a lab.
- In 1990, scientists found that each time a cell divides in culture, telomeres shorten a bit until they get so short that the cell is unable to divide and dies.
Telomeres

• In 2006, scientists at Harvard found that individuals with mood disorders have shorter telomeres than healthy controls.
• In 2011, researchers found that children who had been institutionalized had shorter telomeres.
• In 2012, it was found that telomere length may predict death in older adults.

Stress Reduction

• You can reduce stress by either reducing your exposure to stressful situations (amygdala management which effects the autonomic nervous system), or learning better skills for coping with them (strengthen your prefrontal cortex – cognitive restructuring.)

Best Evidence for Stress Reduction

• Exercise
• Meditation
• Caffeine reduction
• Get enough sleep
• Reappraisal
News Flash!

• Proceeds of the National Academy of Science, Nov 23, 2010:
  • Rats were placed on a stress increasing paradigm and then given sugar. The sugar lowered cortisol levels, improved heart rate variability, increased friendly behavior toward unfamiliar animals, and increased exploration in a maze test. These positive effects lasted for 7 days.

Burnout is Hard to See in Ourselves

• We often do not recognize that we are getting burned out, but our patients do.
• This is compounded by the fact the culture of the health care profession usually does not encourage us to take care of ourselves without feeling guilty, or weak.

The Dimensions of Burnout

• Exhaustion: individual stress component - feeling overextended, depleted of one’s emotional and physical resources
• Cynicism: interpersonal component - negative or callous, excessively detached response to job
• Reduced efficacy/accomplishment: feelings of incompetence and lack of achievement and productivity
Burnout Effects

- Burnout is associated with various forms of job withdrawal: absenteeism, turnover
- For people who stay on at work, burnout leads to lower productivity and effectiveness, poor job satisfaction, reduced commitment. They will often depersonalize their patients and act in a detached or even callous manner.
- Burnout has a negative impact on coworkers, creating more interpersonal conflict and disruption. It is contagious.

Symptoms of Burnout

- Physical Symptoms: fatigue, cognitive impairment, sleep disruption, GI problems, headache, inflammatory changes
- Emotional Symptoms: alienation, cynicism, powerlessness
- Behavioral Symptoms: impatience, negativism, frustration, irritability

Leadership

- The mood of a leader is more powerful than the mood of members of the group. In several studies that have measured leaders and workers moods before and after a task, the leaders mood has proven to be very contagious.
- Interestingly, “negative” contagion seems to be stronger than “positive” contagion.
Burnout in the Mental Health Workforce

• A 2010 review shows that almost all "research" in this area is informal, anecdotal and survey-based.

• Findings:
  • There are consistently high levels of exhaustion, but cynicism and feelings of reduced efficacy are usually low.
  • We know nothing about the impact of interventions on burnout.

Job/Situational Causes

• Overload: exhaustion
• Role Conflict: competing demands
• Role Ambiguity: lack of training
• Severity of Client’s Problems
• Lack of Support from Supervisors (more so than coworkers)

Job/Situational Causes

• Lack of Feedback
• Lack of Control
• Lack of Autonomy
• Lack of Reciprocal Loyalty
• Lack of Perceived Fairness
Job/Situational Causes

• The psychological contract: When we first begin working for an organization, we have certain expectations about what that employment will entail - the job we will be doing, workload, resources, career advancement, job security, etc. Larger social and economic forces can bring about significant changes in these things.

2012 Study

• A study looking at 388 people working in an information technology company were studied. The job was universally described as “stressful.” 15 people experienced significant burnout in the study period.
• Risk factors:
  - less than 6 hours sleep per night
  - thoughts of work during leisure time

Stresses of Mental Health Work
(2ur Institute)

• Emotional fatigue from always working with people who are in pain, grieving, or feeling suicidal.
• Being idealized or demonized by clients.
• Constant worry about suicide or violence.
• A sense of inefficacy in view of the enormous complexity of your clients’ situation.
• Inability to move from the “listener” role to the friend or spouse role.
• Worry about lawsuits.
Effect on Families
(Zur Psychotherapy in Private Practice)

- Treating family members like patients
- Endless interrogations (what did that feel like?)
- Being out of the mood to listen at the end of the day
- Distancing
- Uncritical understanding instead of showing a human reaction
- Labeling
- Jealousy of family members for time and attention

Protective Factors

- Genetics
- Prior life experiences
- Adaptability (the ability to realistically lower one’s ideal expectations via cognitive reframing to prevent undue frustration with obstacles)

The Mismatch Paradigm of Burnout

- Burnout arises from mismatches between the person and the job in six domains. The greater the mismatch, the greater the chance of burnout. The better the match, the greater the likelihood of job engagement.
- Mismatches arise when the initial psychological contract was not clear, or the job changes.
- The six areas are: workload, control, reward, community, fairness, and values.
1) Workload

- Energy can be exhausted to the point that the person can no longer recover.
- Mismatch can also result from the wrong kind of work in terms of skills or inclination.
- Work is especially draining when it requires people to display emotions inconsistent with their feelings.

2) Control

- Mismatches occur most often when workers feel they do not have control over resources needed to do their job most effectively.
- Workers may also feel overwhelmed by their responsibility and feel that their responsibility exceeds their authority.

3) Reward

- Financial rewards
- Social rewards are even more important to most people. Feeling lack of appreciation and having one's hard work ignored devalues the work and the worker.
- Lack of intrinsic reward (pride in work) is also critical for burnout.
4) Community

- People can lose a sense of positive connection with others at work. People thrive when they share praise, comfort, happiness, and humor with those they like and respect. They have a shared sense of values.
- Jobs may isolate workers from one another, but what is most destructive is chronic, unresolved conflict.

5) Fairness

- Fairness communicates respect and confirms people's self-worth.
- Inequity of pay, workload, when there is cheating or when promotions and evaluations are mishandled, or when grievances are not handled appropriately all increase cynicism and emotional exhaustion.
- This dimension is the most predictive of future burnout when it appears.

6) Values

- Employees may feel that their job requires them to act unethically (lie).
- They may feel that their personal values are at odds with their workplace, or that their workplace has contradictory goals (maintain a high case load, be culturally sensitive and emotionally supportive.)
Job Mismatch

• Individuals may place different importance on these six factors. If you really support the values of the organization, you may be able to tolerate problems with reward, for example.
• Investigating job mismatch is a very fruitful way to help supervisors and employees concretely discuss burnout and encourage engagement.

Individual Interventions

• People can learn new coping skills, but it has not been shown that they can apply it at work.
• At best, there may be a reduction in exhaustion, but generally there is no change in cynicism or self-efficacy.
• The most effective change requires integration of workplace and individual needs.

Organizational Approach

• A 2013 study (Leiter 2015) found that employees experiencing burnout were more likely to reengage if their organizations communicated with them well.
• For those workers who felt ineffective, a key factor was whether they could exercise diverse abilities and have a degree of predictability in their job.
Organizational Approach

• CREW: civility, respect, engagement in the workplace. A 6 month intervention
• However, many organizations may believe that since they don’t expect to keep workers forever, working to serve their workers long-term interests is not a goal.

Personal Approach

• Your primary focus should be on preparing yourself for your next career.
• You need to establish work habits that may depart from your employer’s vision. These include:
  • Staying fit
  • Integrate recovery cycles in your life

Personal Approach

• Recruit a friend or two to share a burnout reduction activity (a walk at midday)
• Express positive comments to others. Keep track of your own acts of kindness
• Job craft: spend more of your day on the fulfilling parts of your job and less on the tedious
Detachment From Work

- A recent longitudinal study of 309 human services employees showed that high job demands predicted emotional exhaustion, psychosomatic complaints, and low work engagement over time. Psychological detachment from work during off-job time was an important factor in protecting employee well-being and work engagement.

Personal Approach
(Zur Institute)

- Take personal restoration seriously (exercise, time with loved ones, spiritual practice, sleep, ...)
- Consult and get peer support.
- Practice good risk management.
- Make sure you have time to do what you love doing.
- Balance is the key!