The Characteristics of Stress

Stress As A Bodily Response

- Cannon (1929) termed the body’s initial stress response as **fight-or-flight** – survival
- Your body becomes **physiologically aroused** in order to give you two choices: you either run away (flight) or you face the danger (fight)
- Selye (1956) suggested that there is a **similar response to all stressors**
  - He studies rats and found that their bodies responded the same way whether they were exposed to cold, pain, electric shocks or trauma
  - Selye termed these responses as **General Adaptation Syndrome (GAS)**
    - a 3-stage set of physiological processes which prepare or adapt the body for danger so that we stand a better chance surviving it compared to remaining passively relaxed when faced a threat
    - 3 stages: **Alarm Reaction** (response to a stressor), **Resistance** (under long-term stress), **Exhaustion** (depleted resources following an attempt to repair itself)
  - The body’s response involved in major systems to produce **cortisol** (to release glucose for energy) and **adrenaline** (to fight or flight)

Stress As A Psychological Response

- How we respond to stress depends on how we perceive it
  - Folkman (1984) proposed the **transactional model of stress**
  - Judgement about **how the stressor is perceived** vs. the perceived **ability to cope** (e.g. person A = perceives exams as default and believes they don’t have time to revise and person B = perceives exams as a challenge and believe the ability to revise well and pass)
  - The **interaction** between the two will influence how a person responds
  - The **individual difference** will also play a role on the way that we perceive stress

Different Types Of Stress

**Acute Stress (sudden and intense):** This is the immediate response to stress and the most common (e.g. to an exam or work deadline).

**Episodic Acute Stress:** This is when there are **frequent** and **regular** bouts of **acute stress** (e.g. having a stress response every time a work deadline is due).

**Chronic Stress:** This is stress that persists over a **long-term** (e.g. when experiencing a divorce or caring for an ill person).

Different Effects Of Stress

**Physical:**
- **Short-term** can cause a range of physical responses
  - Sweaty palms
  - Headaches
  - Increased blood pressure
- **Long-term** stress can lead to illnesses such as
  - Coronary heart disease
  - Damage to the immune system

**Psychological:**
- Stress can lead to **low self-esteem**
- Anxiety
- Depression

**Lifestyle:**
- People may turn to **smoke** or **drinking** to escape
- May engage in nail-biting or have **sleep problems**

Exam Stress:

- NSPCC (2015): Childline calls from students worried about exams
- Over **200% rise** in requests for **counselling**
- Exam stress can impact **relationships** as well as sleep
- Exam stress is the **biggest contributor** to **depression** (Madden, 2014)
- **Vital methods** need to be **employed** (e.g. exercise, and taking regular breaks)