

# What is stress



This paper defines stress and how the definition has changed since early stress researchers and some of the methods ways of measuring stress. The Social Readjustment Rating Scale, Daily Hassles Scale, and using an fMRI machine to look at the activity in the brain, are all different ways to measure the stress in our daily lives. This paper also talks about the Carry-Over Effect and how it affects our everyday lives and even the stages we go through in our lives. It includes a study conducted on college students and the stress that comes with school and how it can spillover into their everyday lives.

The last topic this paper covers is gender differences in men and women as far as who is experiencing more stress. What is Stress, How is it Measured, The Carry-Over Effect, and Gender Differences. What is Stress? Psychologists have been studying what stress is and its effects on people since the 1960's. Stress is hard to define; it started out defined as the physiological response to harmful or threatening events; today, textbooks define it as a negative emotional state due to events that are perceived as challenging or exceeding a person's resources or ability to cope.

Stressors are situations or events that we deal with that produce stress which is unavoidable in our everyday lives (Hockenbury & Hockenbury, 497-518). For instance according to Mendoza and Rocha-Singh, young adult college students, age eighteen to twenty-four, would experience stressors such as academic, financial, familia, personal, and environmental domains (Pedersen 620-627).

Bean and Hammer found in a study that due to the amount of stress on students because of their academic workload, fifty-five percent of students reported they have to ignore one subject to prepare for the other subject,

forty-two and half students reported their stress level was moderate, and twenty-seven percent of students reported their stress level was beyond manageable (Kausar 31-45). Stress has been proven to cause physical, psychological, and social problems as well as effect the immune and endocrine system.

There are many ways in which we try to change situations, or our interpretation of those situations and make them more favorable and less threatening. This is called coping. Coping with stress can many times decrease your stress level significantly and can even eliminate stress all together (Hockenbury & Hockenbury, 497-518). How is Stress Measured? In order for us to understand stress and its effect on people, we must create a way to measure it. One method of testing was invented by early stress researchers, Thomas Holmes and Richard Rahe.

They believed that any alteration that required you to adjust your behavior and lifestyle would cause stress. They wanted to create a scale in attempt to measure the extent of stress that people experienced. Their final result was the Social Readjustment Rating Scale, where people were given forty-three life events and were told to check off the ones they had experienced in the past month. Each of those events had a corresponding pre-assigned numerical rating that estimated the impact in terms of life change units.

These units ranged from 100, being the most stress producing to 11, being the least. Examples include death of spouse (rated 100) and minor violation of the law was eleven, see table one for more sample items from the original Social Readjustment Rating Scale. When they went through all forty-three life events they were to total the corresponding numbers with the life events

they chose and add them all together. Holmes and Rahe discovered that people whose total was more than 150, had an increased rate of physical or psychological illness. Today, we recognize that this experiment has some flaws.

One being that the fact that the numbers are already pre-assigned means they are assuming that every event will have the same impact on everyone. An obvious example undermining the validity of this scale is Retirement. If you have had a horrible job and cruel boss then retirement might make your life event unit be an eleven, but in this study it's pre-assigned that it's forty-five. Another flaw in this experiment is that in general these numbers are not good predictors of poor physical or mental health. Today, researchers found that most people endure major life events without developing a serious physical or psychological problem.

One last important flaw is that they assume both good and bad events produce stress. Today, researchers state that negative life events have a greater toll on your health especially when the situation is out of your control, or is unexpected. Therefore, the positive events have a very minimal effect on your health. Regardless of the flaws, the Social Readjustment Rating Scale is still used today and psychologists have been making efforts to revise it and make the scale a more effective measure of stress (Hockenbury & Hockenbury, 499 & 500).