

Stress and Depression: Are they Really Related?

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Sir,

Irrelevant use of the term depression in smallest inconveniences: In my own observation during day-to-day conversation with friends or family, the term depression is commonly used to justify the emotional isolation. Common people do not see it as any different from stress or anxiety. Even emotional ventilation, such as crying, is sometimes said to be depression. I often hear suggestions of ventilating one's feelings or performing leisure activities to get rid of depression. Although, the importance of emotional ventilation can never be understated in order to manage mental health, according to the WHO, depression is a mental disorder that is identified by a loss of pleasure or interest in daily activities for a long period of time, the causes of which may vary from physical or emotional abuse to severe losses in life. Depression needs to be diagnosed and treated, whereas the misuse of the term may lead to misidentification and the illusion that talking to loved ones and getting indulged in one's favourite activities can cure it.

Is stress necessary in life? While advocating a stress-free living, we are somewhere downsizing the importance of positive stress in the accomplishment of our everyday goals. That positive form of stress is called eustress, where our body and mind are slight-

ly pushed to perform well, and it results in improved work quality and the achievement of personal as well as organizational objectives. Eustress is a very important part of our lives in order to keep us motivated and enthusiastic about our goals. It helps the student's study well for their upcoming exams; job aspirants prepare well before appearing for the interviews; an individual at risk for obesity starts exercising more frequently; and so on. The key here is to understand the fine line between eustress and distress. Both terms represent a mechanism where the body and mind receive an external stimulus from the environment, perceive it as a threat or a challenge, and produce physical as well as mental changes. The only difference is that, in cases of distress, the response is overwhelming, which leads to an extreme physical, emotional, and behavioural response. These responses can often be identified as a group of symptoms, such as insomnia, changed bowel movements, headaches, etc. However, if one can understand the difference between positive and negative stress and use the positive stress effectively, it will definitely result in better performance.¹

Can stress cause depression? Stress response does pretty good in short response, it does not do very good in long term. Causal relationship is bidirectional. It means that one causes other and other can cause first. According to a survey report of Mental

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Health Institution, levels of depression among members of Gen Z went up to 4-5% between pre and post pandemic.

Stress has the capacity to occupy an individual's mind to that extent that he/she may find it difficult to divert themselves with other healthy coping mechanisms, which are proven to improve their mood. Stress induced mood changes lead to further deterioration in the overall coping mechanism leading to increase in stress. Stress not just affects an individual, but it has a negative impact on the surrounding environment as well. It can lead to emotional withdrawal from the family and friends, deteriorating the personal as well as professional relationship of an individual.

Stress acts as a trigger for the central nervous system and leads to an array of continuous activation and deactivation of neural signals throughout the brain. These fluctuations can put the body in the stages of hyperactivity and hypo activity simultaneously. For a short span of time, the brain and body can cope with these fluctuations by creating a sync, whereas, if continued for a longer duration, this might create a reverse response on the brain and from the stages of hyperactivity, it can set in a continuous state of inactivity leading to depressive episodes.

Is stress predictor of depression? Although it is well established that stress can be a cause of depression, but it is also important to understand that it cannot be regarded as the obvious cause. Before predicting stress, a cause of depression, it becomes extremely important to know the fact that what is predicting the stress.

Research studies supporting the fact that stress accounts for more than 40% of the population and more than 80% of depressive disorders are predicted by the stress. Talking about the stress, the exposure to the stressful event in general cannot contribute to the depression. Authors feels that cognitive, behavioural or interpersonal changes could be a leading cause of the stress and thus the contributing factor to the depression.²

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