

STRESS DEMYSTIFIED

A CLARION CALL

ELVIS MUTUGI

© Elvis Mutugi, 2021

The moral rights of the author have been asserted.

All rights reserved. No part of this book may be reproduced or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic or mechanical, including photocopying, recording, or by any information storage and retrieval system, without the publisher's written permission, except where permitted by law.

ISBN-13: 979-8390-47-888-2

Published and Printed by **Elong'o Publishers**

P.O. Box 944, Narok Kenya

Email: info@elongopublishers.co.ke

Phone: +254742433826/+254114496083

Website: <https://elongopublishers.co.ke>

Elvis Mutugi

Phone no 0743674371

Email- elvismutugi0@gmail.com

DEDICATION

To people everywhere, especially those who envy the bliss and tranquility that accompanies good mental health.

ACKNOWLEDGMENT

This book represents among early accomplishments in my career as a psychologist and a philosophy scholar. It corresponds with my studies in the university, so I have rely relied on my family, lecturers, and colleagues for support; financially, emotionally, and on content reviews. It's a big thank you to many who were powerful role models and guardians. I am grateful to my grandma Rigeta Muthoni and grand pa Riungu Kiama for the encouragement and support that they offered me all through. I also appreciate my mum Mercy Mukami, my uncles Partrick Kirimi, Moffat Kinoti, and Japhet Muthomi. Aunties Purity Kawira, Frindah Gakii, and Iddah Gatwiri for being my lifelong inspiration and untiring love.

I sincerely appreciate the philosophy and psychology colleagues for helping me shape my ideas in writing. It has been a period of strum and drang, but you all made me overcome. I appreciate Esther, Joel, Derrick, Laura, Frank, Fridah, Charity, Mwangi, Bonface, Karugu, Yvonne, and others for helping me hone the ideas. Special thanks to Elong'o Publishers for the professional editorial of the manuscript. I would also like to thank Dr. Fabio Ogachi, and Dr.Tadayo Kibaba, who also guided me in reviewing the content. Finally, I thank everyone who believed in my potential and supported my work.

PREFACE

You are not reading this book by accident; we all are suffering from this disease. Let us assume walking down a street, and there are a lot of guys moving to and fro, you will notice that most of them look perfectly healthy, no signs of physical symptoms like shrieking, shivering or debilitated as its common with some sicknesses, but most of them are facing some forms of stress. Life will at times offer us big or small nasty pills, but swallowing we must certainly since that's the laws of nature. You might get stressed from some unplanned or unexpected event; it might be some changes in your life that create new demands like being fired from a job, losing a loved one or starting a business. Some of us will have to carry daily stressors in our minds like living in an unhappy relationship, financial problems where we engage in the rat race, illnesses and many others. Having frequent frustrations on daily activities also becomes stressful like paying bills, getting into traffic jams, dealing with bosses or customers, dealing with the school system perhaps for the learners who are required to wake up early hours and the heat rushes from assignments. In addition, others might even be facing worse stressors where they carry emotional burdens from early childhood experiences like trauma or poor parenting.

In this case, any form or source of stress one may be facing, if experienced for a while, may make you worry, lead to exhaustion and eventually, if not well managed, becomes dangerous since it will overwhelm you when piled up in excess. However, when we are endowed with the knowledge of the stress responses of the mind and body, its implication to our health and the general roots of different forms of stress, one can be able to cope easily and handle it. Then ensure our minds remain calm, enthralled and primed for a better happy life since we all can rule the roost over the stressors we face.

However, stress is also critical in our lives. We need stress in our daily life because it has some benefits. Well, surprised you are I know, but think like this; how would-be life if there was no stress? In my view, it would be

a bit unexciting. When we are exposed to mild stressors that we can master, we get to cope better with an enormous stressor later on. It enhances our resilience to future similar and more demanding stresses. From the theory of mental toughness, experiencing manageable stress, with recovery in between, can make you mentally and physically tougher and less reactive to stress. It's like being vaccinated. Stress also challenges us to soldier on in our lives, enhancing our possibilities and opportunities in our endeavours'.

“When we long for a life without difficulties, remind us that oaks grow stronger in contrary winds and diamonds are made under pressure,”
Peter Marshall.

It's important to note that stress usually has different meanings for people under different conditions, as you will learn later. When stressed, the brain becomes oversensitive to danger and signals that there might be threats to one's survival hence preparing the body for extreme actions that aren't appropriate to your day-to-day challenges (Sapolsky 2004).

THIS BOOK WILL HELP YOU

- Learn how to change by reorienting your brain for better coping with stress by helping you calm the stress responses and get resilient to stress; this will allow your mind to develop a rational mindful response.
- Understand the major roots and biology of stress
- Help you curb unhealthy stress responses to help create and enhance solutions to today's and future problems
- Learn new coping strategies
- Enlighten, motivate, restore the lost sense of control, help gain clarity and focus on stress management
- Guide on how to live a happy life in the face of stress by developing resilience

The pessimist looks down and hits his head. The optimist looks up and loses his footing. The realist looks forward and adjusts his path accordingly. Robert Kirkman

Contents

DEDICATION	iii
ACKNOWLEDGMENT	v
PREFACE	vi
STRESS RESPONSES	13
WHAT TYPE OF STRESS ARE YOU FACING?.....	14
UNDERSTANDING STRESS.....	Error! Bookmark not defined.
THE BIOLOGY OF STRESS.....	Error! Bookmark not defined.
MAJOR CAUSES OF STRESS.....	Error! Bookmark not defined.
INDIVIDUAL DIFFERENCES IN COPING AND RESPONSE TO STRESS.....	Error! Bookmark not defined.
WHY IS CHRONIC STRESS DANGEROUS TO YOUR HEALTH?	Error! Bookmark not defined.
CULTURE, AGE, PARENTHOOD, SEX AND GENDER IMPLICATIONS ON STRESS	Error! Bookmark not defined.
HOW TO LIVE AMONGST STRESSORS USING RATIONAL STRATEGIES AND STYLES	Error! Bookmark not defined.
THE SELF AND STRESS CONCERNS.....	Error! Bookmark not defined.
GAINING CONTROL OVER YOUR STRESS.....	Error! Bookmark not defined.
PSYCHOPATHOLOGY	Error! Bookmark not defined.
REFERENCES	Error! Bookmark not defined.

Foreword

Stress is a commonly mentioned word in our daily discourse, yet perhaps remains one of the most misunderstood phenomena. The lack of clarity in understanding this concept obviously impedes our efforts to cope with its impact on our lives. In *Stress Demystified*, the author has done a splendid job of lucidly unpacking this phenomenon. Further, he has provided invaluable insights and suggestions on how to manage stress so as to minimize its possible impact on our mental and physical health. In *Stress Demystified*, the author presents a compelling case for all of us to read in this fast-paced changing world.

Dr Kibaba Makokha is a Senior Lecturer in Philosophy and current Chairman of the Department of Philosophy and Religious Studies, Kenyatta University.

Stress is a common word that is used in our day-to-day interactions. Almost everyone has experienced stress, from the unborn child to the oldest person. All living things experience stress—our shared understanding of stress is something undesirable and to be avoided. However, in this book, Elvis delves deeper to demystify stress and why we experience it. He provides valuable insights into the nature of stress; that is, it is an adaptive response to the threats to our survival. One of the issues that stand out is the section on the biology of stress. It provides a picture of the role played by various hormones and chemicals in our body during stress. This helps us understand the connection between physical and mental health. The role of our experiences, perspectives and predispositions in our experience of stress is also explained in a helpful and straightforward manner. Significantly, this book does not just help us understand stress better but provides us with tips and strategies that we can use to cope with stress. Ultimately, this book helps us understand and be better equipped to deal with the inevitable stress in our lives.

DR. FABIO OGACHI. A psychology lecturer at Kenyatta University. Member of Kenya counsellors and psychologists Association and Patron Kenyatta university psychology students Association.

Stress demystified is a work of knowledge in its class, crafted to detail and refined in its presentation. This book's attention to detail dissects stress in a clarified manner leaving no stone unturned. Specifications with relevant instances covered with the knowledge of science in it are mind-blowing. On a lighter note, stress just got stressed—a must-read.

MUTATHI WA WACHIRA. Author, Thoughts of an African son

"In an age where we are constantly bombarded by information and when times are rapidly changing, learning how to manage stress is paramount for our mental and physical health. Stress demystified is the book to help you in that endeavour. Buy one for yourself and one for a friend."

KARUGU KIUGO. President Amazing minds club and Chairman Chess club in Kenyatta University.

"To experience peace does not mean that your life is always blissful; it means that you are capable of tapping into a blissful state of mind amidst the normal chaos of a hectic, chaotic life." Jill Botte.

STRESS RESPONSES

When stressed, one has an uneven feeling; one cannot balance their mind. They start overthinking of the negative consequences they might end up in; they might even run out of ideas to handle the stressors because they start taking the blame and self-criticism, which should not be the case. The brain is the one usually experiencing almost all the stress stimuli. The manner one trains their brain is critical in handling stress. There are Parts of the brain like the amygdala involved with emotions the body gets into. For example, when you have a physical stressor in your environment like, perhaps you're working in an industry or any other place and the supervisor sends you to get something in a store. It happens you hear some sudden movement inside the old overstuffed furniture that is no longer in use, one might develop a claustrophobic feeling; after that, the Amygdala determines that the threat is present. It definitely responds by signalling some hormones and other chemical messengers, the neurotransmitters. This process is what causes panic in most people when stressed. These hormones initiate physiological changes in the body like increased heartbeat, high breathing rate and this basically prepares you to fight or flee. This autonomic stress response is usually helpful when in the face of physical stressors like being attacked by a wild animal. For instance, in the old musty overstuffed items, a snake darts towards you, then the autonomic stress response is activated, but it's not healthy when you are facing prolonged and repeated stressors. The hormones released help us focus on the problem, energize and prime us to handle the obstacle at hand, but they negatively affect some parts of our bodies like the heart, our immune system, the brain itself and others. So, in order to cope well in life, we have to learn to compartmentalize our emotions, overcome and learn to handle daily disappointments and stressors; I will take you through this and other finer details about stress in this book.

WHAT TYPE OF STRESS ARE YOU FACING?

The stimuli causing stress are referred to as **stressors**. There are many different types of stressors. They include **acute stressors like daily hassles, chronic stressors, major life events, developmental transitions, and they all could be Eustress or Distress**. Firstly, for you to effectively manage stress, you should be able to understand the types of stressors that you are facing.

To understand the types of stress you're facing, it's vital to comprehend various standard definitions of stress given by researchers over history. The first and all-inclusive definition was proposed by Hans Selye, whom I will go deeper into later in his stress theory. Selye emphasized that stress is a non-specific response to any demand; this was the most appropriate and generic definition. This definition is universally accepted in all languages like those in which no such thing or word as stress previously existed. Stress is not similar to emotional arousal or nervous tension since it is evident that stress could occur when humans or even animals are under anaesthesia and even can occur in plants or bacteria that lack a nervous system from the findings of several kinds of research. Stress is not something to be avoided because the mere fact that we are alive creates some demand for life maintaining energy. Not even when asleep, since the heart, digestive system, reproductive system, nervous system and many other organs will continue with their functions. Only death can free us from the burden of stress. It's a sort of activity that we must experience at times daily.

In behavioural sciences, stress is commonly viewed as a state of mental perception of threat from emotional strain, anxiety discomfort and difficulty in adjustment, which results from different circumstances and a pattern of physiological, behavioural, emotional and cognitive responses to

real or imagined stimuli, at times, it can be perceived as blocking a goal or endangering or otherwise threatening our wellbeing. In group situations, stress comes to being when the group lacks cohesion and good structure, and this makes it difficult for group members to cope with the current demand of the situation facing them.

Stress can also be defined in terms of pure endocrinology like Eugene Yates defines stress as any stimulus that will provoke the release of ACTH and glucocorticoids, as you will see later in the discussion. Other psychologists define it as a general term describing the psychological and bodily response to a stimulus that alters a person's state of equilibrium [Lazarus and Folkman 1984].

Richard Lazarus, also famous in stress studies, focuses on cognitive psychology more so on emotions. He believes it's difficult to reach a precise overarching definition or meaning of stress due to its dynamics. He says, "Despite constant confusion about the precise meaning of the term, stress is widely recognized as a central problem in human life. Scientists of many disciplines have conceptualized stress, but each field appears to have something different in mind concerning its meaning. For the sociologist, it is social disequilibrium, that is, disturbances in the social structure within which people live. Engineers conceive stress as some external force that produces strain in the materials exposed to it. Physiologists deal with physical stressors that include a wide range of stimulus conditions that are noxious to the body. In the history of psychological stress research, there has been no clear separation between physical stressors which attack biological tissue systems and psychological stressors which produce their effects purely because of their psychological significance."

Kim and Diamond (2002) brought up new ideas about three-component definitions of stress applicable across all paradigms. To begin with, stress requires **heightened arousal**, which can be verified by neurochemical levels like adrenaline and glucocorticoids, which we will

discuss later; in behavioural activity and electroencephalography (a test that detects electrical activity in the brain by attaching electrodes in the scalp). This can be seen anytime, even when one is asleep, since the brain cells communicate through electrical impulses that are active all the time. Secondly, the experience one gets from stress must cause **heightened dislike**, and lastly, individuals might **lack control**. With control of these aversive experiences, one might mitigate how stressful the experience feels. Having control of or the element of predictability determines the magnitude of the stress experience and how susceptible one is to developing stress-induced behavioural and physiological abnormalities.

In “The devil and Miss Prym,” Paulo Coelho puts it clear that “when we least expect it, life sets us a challenge, to test our courage and willingness to change; at such moment, there is no point in pretending that nothing has happened or in saying that we are not ready. The challenge will not wait. Life does not look back”.

Life isn't always straightforward but rather filled with challenges that threaten or may complicate it. Some life experiences will inspire you and there are other experiences you might never come into terms with, for instance, the death of a friend, relative or a close associate. These obviously might be people you love who you will lose, but some will stay, and you should appreciate them and enjoy life with them, make jokes and laugh with them until you cry. Daily life will exhaust by the chaos of it, but again, you will be reignited and that is the beauty of it. At times you will hurt others by creating stressors in their lives, but you will also be hurt by others who are also living their life. Sometimes you will get comfort alone in your closure, but other times you might find comfort with others, which will help you let go of your negative feelings and emotions. My grandfather once had three pots with water; he placed a carrot in one pot, an egg and grounded coffee beans in the other two pots and boiled the water. The outcome was different in all pots. The egg was fragile at first but came out hard while that was the opposite of carrot but, the coffee beans turned the watercolour. Well, my question is, if life is the boiling

water in the pot, how will it turn us? Or should we make life a cup of coffee? I would prefer the latter

You should understand this is your life, but it will not be as you always wish; it's always unpredictable, and at times it might even break you down or frustrate you. Again, by the mere fact we are alive, we must face our daily stressors or challenges in a rational way with a clear mind for us to survive, and we must survive at all costs. For the sake of our mental health, we must handle stress well until it gets to the point of death when we shall win our battles. Beware of the perpetual delusion of grandeur.

**Buy the ebook to continue
reading**