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The tendency of creating social contacts is influenced by the ability to adapt to stress

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Abstract

Stress is one of the most worrying factors which affect the life of modern people. It makes its presence felt in all areas of human life: personal, professional and social. As people are increasingly under stress, have increasingly less care of their physical and mental health these gradually deteriorate. This study has two main objectives: the first is to investigate if the ability to adapt to stress influences people’s tendency to create social contacts, and the second is to study if there are gender differences in terms of the tendency of creating social contacts.

Keywords: the adaptation to stress, social contacts, affiliation

1. Introduction

“Stress is caused by any new circumstances that require adaptive response. Generated by a single factor, stress can be different depending on the personality of the individual factors or the circumstances of the moment.” (Aniței, 2010, p. 442)

Ordinary events could also produce stress reactions; some characteristics can be considered and felt like stressful, for example: controllability, predictability and whether that tests the individuals’ limits. (Lazarus and Folkman, 1984)

Stress is not caused by any conflict which appears at an intrapersonal level, it has to achieve a certain degree of intensity; it appears when the person has to choose one of several options, needs, motivations, goals, ways of action

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etc. which exclude each other, and it is very difficult to make a final decision. The attempt to find a compromise between competitive reasons can generate a real feeling of stress. (Epstein, 1982)

Holmes and Rahe (1967) have released a study which shows that stress is determined also by negative and positive events. They constructed a scale of vulnerability for measuring the level of stress in certain situations, and the highest scores were obtained for: marriage, divorce, retirement, birth of a baby, going on vacation.

Kobasa and collaborators (1979) started with a description of a resistant personality to stress. They think that this person has to consider that he has the control on most of the experiences that he has to pass, he is implicated in his vital activities and treats changes like challenges which must be removed.

The cognitive theory of stress, which is developed by Lazarus and his collaborators (1986) contributed significantly to the awareness of personal variables which influence the relation between stimuli and stress reactions. In the present it is unanimously recognized that the stress experience is in direct connection with the matching degree between a person and his environment; a person will experience stress if a particular situation is evaluated as threatening him (de Jong & Emmelkamp, 2000). A human being has resources and can react in several plans of his life, physical, physiological, cognitive, emotional and behavioral in order to control or to reduce requirements exerted trying to increase his resilience or to remove them.

In generally, researches indicate that self-confidence can be a moderator of the relationship stress-response. (Cooper and co., 2001). People who have self-confidence are capable of finding and using more effective strategies for managing stress, than those who do not trust in their own resources. (Ganster & Schaubroeck, 1993).

Although the necessity of belonging is a frequent theme in novels, poems, plays and in the recently sociological literature, there is little scientific information to characterize it. There are known the destructive effects of frequent moves on children, the general excess of mobility required by the industrialization, the disorientation, the loss of the group, the forced separation from family, house, friends and neighbors. Unfortunately we still undervalue the importance of the community, of its own territory, of those like himself, his class, his group or his colleagues.

There is the belief that amazing and rapid propagation of training groups, or those for the personal development and the communities dedicated to mutual support, can be motivated by the unmet need of contact, intimacy and belonging. Such social phenomenon may occur to counteract the alienation feelings and loneliness. Furthermore, we are left with the impression that some of young rebel groups exist because of the profound need of being a part of a community, social contacts or of being allied against a common enemy.

Atkinson and McClelland (1948) developed several studies and one of the most important issues was the affiliation. This was defined as a concern for the establishment and maintenance of positive and affective relationships with other people and the desire to be liked and accepted.

There are many situations where people feel the need for affiliation. A situation that causes a greater need for affiliation is during a stressful period. For example, a case where there was an increased need for affiliation among people was immediately after the attacks of 11September from World Trade Center. This event led to the setting aside of differences and campaigns were created to support people who were in difficulties. Also, situations which include fear often lead to uniting people and triggering the need for affiliation.

Both comments based on the experience of everyday life, and a considerable amount of psychosociological research certify that the social beings, people are attracted to each other. We work together with our colleagues, we live together with neighbors and most people want a stable job. This social motivation starts with the need for affiliation: desire to establish social contacts with others. People differ in the intensity of their need for affiliation, but it seems that each of us is motivated to establish and to maintain an optimal level of social interaction; so we alternate the moments and the situations in which we ardently want to be with others and also the moments when we want to be alone.

Bibb Latané and Carol Werner (1974) have found that the laboratory mice are more likely to approach their peers after a period of isolation, and more distant after spending time in crowded. Studies in mice have suggested that, as well as many other species of animals, possess a kind of „social thermostat“ designed to regulate the affiliative tendencies.

Are there similar mechanisms in humans? Shawn O'Connor and Lorne Rosenblood (1996) made an experiment on a group of students which they were asked to wear some beeps for four days. Whenever they received a signal (on average every hour) participants were writing if at that time they were in the presence of someone or they were themselves, and if they wanted to be with someone or not. The results showed that in two-thirds of the cases
participants were found in the desired situation; more relevant is that the desired situation for them at one time allowed a prediction, quite accurate, of their situation from the following time of verification. Whether students want the moments of loneliness or social contacts, usually they succeeded to regulate their individual needs for affiliation.

People may differ in regard to their needs for affiliation, but there are a lot of moments when we all want to be together with our fellows; visible are either intense moments of collective euphoria or the moments of danger. For example the onrush people on the streets immediately after the fall of Ceausescu's dictatorship or after victories of the national football team.

2. Methodology

2.1. Objectives

The first objective of this study is to identify whether the adaptability to stress influences the tendency to create social contacts.

The second objective is to see if there is a difference between men and women regarding the level of ability to adapt to stress.

2.2. Hypotheses

- There is a significant statistical difference between people who have a high capacity to adapt to stress and those who have a lower level of stress adaptability, in terms of the tendency to create social connections.
- There is a significant statistical difference between women and men concerning the ability to adapt to stress, in the sense that women have a lower level of adaptation to stress than men.

2.3. Participants

The selection of participants is systematic random, because initially 84 people were tested, and then I chose two comparable groups from the point of view of the members number. Thus, in this study participated 53 people, with the aged between 18 and 35 years.

2.4. The instruments

To measure the ability to adapt to stress I used „The assessment test of adaptation to stress”, which is part of the personality test form PsiRuteva battery. It contains 45 items that measure personal skills to overcome daily stress and other difficulties. Based on the factorial analysis were identified four factors: activism, emotional reactivity, adaptation, relaxation, and a global indicator of adaptation to stress which was used in this study.

The need for affiliation questionnaire contains 24 items whose results are measured on a Likert scale with five response options. It was drawn up by me so I had to verify that it was compliant with the conditions for developing a questionnaire. The Cronbach alpha coefficient was used to study the reliability and the resulted value is 0.75.

2.5. Procedure

Subjects were tested on the same day with both of the two questionnaires. The study was conducted in a quiet, light and airy room, suitable for testing, each time, groups of 10 persons. I started testing people with the test which measure the adaptation to stress and then I gave them the test for the need for affiliation. Data was collected over a period of five days.
3. Results

**Ip. 1.** To test the first hypothesis it was used a nonparametric statistical test, Kruskal Wallis, because the results are measured on an ordinal scale and the number of the independent groups are three for each variable.

| Ranks | Adapt_to_stress | N   | Mean Rank |
|-------|----------------|-----|-----------|
| Tendency_affiliation | 1.00 | 19  | 28.11     |
|        | 2.00 | 16  | 26.34     |
|        | 3.00 | 18  | 26.42     |
| Total  |      | 53  |           |

Table 1. Kruskal Wallis Test - ability to adapt to stress and the tendency of affiliation

Test Statisticsa,b

| Chi-Square | df | Asymp. Sig. |
|------------|----|-------------|
| 0.173      | 2  | 0.917       |

a. Kruskal Wallis Test
b. Grouping Variable: Adapt_to_stress

As it appears from the above tables, the research hypothesis is invalidated, so there is no significant difference between people who are able to adapt to stress in terms of social contacts that they tend to create. (the Kruskal Wallis test is 0.17, the significance threshold is 0.91, and the average of the three groups are about equal 28.11, 26.34 and 26.42).

**Ip. 2.** To test the second assumption I selected Mann-Whitney statistical test, because the goal is to identify if there is a significant difference between men and women (independent variable is measured on nominal scale) in terms of ability to adapt to stress (dependent variable is measured on ordinal scale).

Table 2. Mann-Whitney Test- ability to adapt to stress in women and men

| Ranks | Gender | N | Mean Rank | Sum of Ranks |
|-------|--------|---|-----------|--------------|
|       | Adapt_to_stress | 21 | 32.24 | 677.00 |
|       | men     | 32 | 23.56 | 754.00 |
|       | women   | 53 |       |           |
The results presented in the tables above show that there is a significant difference between women and men in terms of ability to adapt to stress, in the sense that women have a lower capacity than men to adapt to stress; therefore the research hypothesis is confirmed. The value of the test is 226, at the significance threshold 0.03 and the averages of the two samples are 23.56 for women and 32.24 for men.

4. Conclusions

People differ in terms of intensity in respect to the need for affiliation, but it seems that everyone is motivated to establish and maintain an optimal level of social interaction, so it’s understandable that the individual level of adaptation to stress has no significant influence on initiating and sustaining social contacts.

One explanation could be that people are more open to self-education groups, personal development and support, thereby being able, in daily situations, to break dependencies to others, and to discover their own ways to maintain physical or mental integrity. Another explanation is that defense mechanisms work to restore the balance, and if it is necessary to establish a social contact, it will happen, and the stress will not be felt at the conscious or verbal level.

It seems that women have less ability to adapt to stress than men for the ordinary events of life. One explanation would be that the differences in sensory threshold, women are more aware of an increase in intensity than men, perceiving more external stimuli as stressors. Increased sensitivity in a woman will make her more responsive to external factors in order to protect her-self.

It was shown many years ago, that women are more analytical than men, and when feeling of inadequate in relation with others or with the environment they will experience more situations/events as stressful. The fight pleas and arguments, trying to find the best option at the time, often generates considerable stress.

The relevant information revealed in this study could not be presented as universally valid because the sample whose results were used is too small to generalize to the population to which it belongs. A future direction to study is given by increasing the sample, and another one is given by investigating the link between resilience to stress and need for affiliation of the individual following a strong, negative, sudden and unexpected event.

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