

# Stress factors in modern urban lifestyles: an Indonesian perspective

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An Indonesian perspective of lifestyle in an urban environment is likely to be sharper because of how recent and substantial urbanisation has been. Contrasts between rural and new urban ways of life make the stressors more obvious than they may be to those in societies where the industrial revolution occurred much earlier. Additionally, the post-industrial society is grafted onto a recent industrial society in cities like Jakarta. The impact on nutritional flows through work patterns, eating styles and family life requires attention. There are medical-physiological and psychological approaches to the understanding of stress. In this way, an appreciation of factors other than the food supply itself on nutritional status can be gained. These include fashion, peer pressure, relationships, physical activity patterns and food patterns. Management of these stressors provides additional opportunities for preventive health.

**Key words:** modern lifestyle, stress

## Introduction

Through technology and the advances of science, our understanding of the world has grown and with it a sense of the seemingly limitless opportunity and diversity that our environment makes possible for us. We have tended to regard this environment as something that can be controlled, but now we are also becoming more aware of how the environment can affect us in sometimes unforeseen ways.

Brilliant solutions to problem of production, communication, transportation and so on have also provided us with a host of new problems. Due to industrialisation (and technology) people had to move from their jobs, labourers were driven out of from the inland, farmers went into cities. People said that the city life was much better, because they could escape from poverty. Now as we are moving from an industrial to a post-industrial society, we are rapidly brought into a high-tech society for which many of us are not well-prepared. As a consequence of what is happening, lifestyle changes rapidly within a fairly short time.

## Lifestyle in a modern urban society

Lifestyle can be viewed as a unique pattern of living which influences and is reflected by one's behaviour. Lifestyle can be measured from activities, interests and opinions such as: how a person spends his time and money, the kind of food he is interested in, etc.

In modern society, structure and values shift quickly. Family life has undergone a good deal of restructuring in this era. Just to quote a few examples: more working mothers, more financial pressures, nuclear families are not as stable as before, extended families are diminishing, and there are more pressured work schedules.

In other words, lives in an urban modern society are more complex and often filled with tensions. As a

consequence many people experience stressful lives and have hectic schedules which characterise an urban modern lifestyle. Hour by hour, day by day, the body is mobilised to help us deal with the interpersonal and impersonal stressors we encounter.

## *Some other modern lifestyle characteristics are:*

### 1 Work life

- a) A busy life: many people in the city leave home early in the morning and come back late in the evening. There is much work to do, so they are busy working, it seems that time is always too short. More over, they often have to drive through very stressful traffic jams that requires a lot of patience.
- b) Diversity of activities: many people find themselves running from one place to another, doing different activities in the same period. Many are involved in more than one organisation whether it is due to interest or status.
- c) The fast improvement in technology enables business to move at a faster rate. As a result it creates tougher competitiveness in the business world.

### 2. Eating - style

- Busy work schedules often mean people miss breakfast or a proper lunch. Because of time pressure many 'eat on the run'. Many persons now eat out and quite often they go to fast-food restaurants which do not necessarily offer a nutritious diet.

### 3. Family - life

- Husband, wife and children spend less time together. Many women who are working face incompatibilities between their roles, in big cities, as a mother and as employees. Advertising offers more attractive

This paper was presented at the International Workshop on 'Modern Lifestyles and Micronutrient Deficiency' in Nusa Dua, Bali on October 19-21, 1995.

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products which result in more economic demands to fulfil the needs of children.

### Stress and stressors

The term stress has many definitions; it depends on the approach that is used.

#### Medical - physiological approach:

Hans Selye<sup>1</sup>, a pioneer in stress research, defined stress as 'a non specific response of the body to any demand'. He formulated the concept of the 'General Adaptation Syndrome' (GAS). The GAS is an automatic response to any physical or emotional threat to the well-being of an organism. This response occurs in three phases: the alarm reaction, the resistance stage, and the exhaustion stage.

In the first phase, the alarm reaction, the body's resistance dips slightly below normal as preparation is made to fight the stressor. In the second phase, the stage of resistance, the body goes through a period of above average and persistent resistance to stress. If stress continues, however, the final phase, the stage of exhaustion, may be reached. In this phase the body's resources are depleted, breakdown occurs, and death may even result.

#### Psychological approach

This approach defines stress as an internal state which can be caused by psychological demands on the body or by environmental and social situations which are appraised or evaluated as potentially harmful, threatening or challenging or exceeding our resources for coping. The psychological approach explained why different people respond in different way to the same kind of stressor. One person may not be bothered driving in heavy traffic while others might be very tense.

Stress may have both beneficial and destructive effects upon the individual. Performance improves with increasing amounts of stress up to an optimum point. Beyond that point, additional amounts of stress will result in a reduction in performance level.

Selye called the good stress Eustress and bad stress Distress<sup>2</sup>. Eustress is the healthy, positive, and constructive stress, while distress is the unhealthy, negative and destructive one which comes out of the stress response. The consequences could include cardiovascular disease, high absenteeism, or other illness.

Sources of stress or stressors are events or situations may be manifold. Stressors can be divided into:

- a) Physical stressors: heat, noise, fire, working condition, pollution.
- b) Psychological/social stressors:
  - i. Social and economical stressors such as unemployment, cost of housing, taxes.
  - ii. Job and career stressors such as power struggles, competition, dead lines.
  - iii. Interpersonal stressors such as conflicts, different values, communication.
  - iv. Frustration, uncertainly, changes in life.

Soewondo<sup>3</sup> identified sources of stress of 300 employees working in private organisations in Jakarta as follows:

1. Working conditions: the room was too small, too hot, too cold, noisy, not enough illumination.
2. Work content: deadline, time pressure, work overload, job too complex, too much work.

3. Job requirement like job status and career not clear, no promotion prospects, the problem of reward and appreciation.
4. Interpersonal relationships such as bosses who demand too much, no support from colleagues, could not cooperate with peers, conflicts with friends, leadership style.

Another study done in Jakarta by Soewondo<sup>4</sup> to identify stress sources for 100 active women, who were working or active in organisation, showed that the stressors were:

1. Too much work, too many tasks and insufficient time to accomplish the assigned task.
2. No work at the office, underload, bored.
3. Difficulties with supervisors, bosses who are not flexible, colleagues who do not want to understand, bad relationship with colleagues.
4. Sex discrimination, especially if a position in an organisation is open and the male is considered to fill it.
5. Interpersonal relationships, guilty feelings, gossip, anxiety feelings of insufficiency, jealousy, problem in relations with household matters and servants.
6. Stressors exclusive to women such as life or physiological changes like menstruation and pregnancy.

Natalia<sup>5</sup> in her study of 30 working mothers in Jakarta, found that there were five important stressors. They were:

1. Guilty feelings
2. Sex discrimination in the working world
3. Frustration because of limited time for hobbies and sport
4. Work overload
5. Influence of family life toward work.

#### Effects of stress

When a situation or an event is perceived by the individual as a stressor, a psychophysiological reaction known as the stress response will occur.

When the stress response is elicited too intensely or too frequently and the individual is unable to find a suitable outlet, the result is individual distress. The manifestation of this distress can be behavioural, psychological or medical.

Halim<sup>6</sup> did a study in Jakarta with 76 managers and foremen working in private organisations. The subjects reported that their first stress reactions were:

- a. Physical: heart beats faster, increased, perspiration, dry lips, queasy stomach.
- b. Psychological: feeling tense, anxious, not able to concentrate, want to go to the toilet, want to leave the stress situation.

If an individual experiences frequent or prolonged intense arousal, the consequences of this individual distress can take any of the following: heart disease, backache, stroke, high blood pressure, depression, sleep disturbances.

Ilsiana Jatipura<sup>7</sup> investigated 100 male Myocardial Infarct patients in Jakarta and their surroundings and found that smoking, stress at work and other life stresses were the three highest apparent contributors to their coronary heart disease. Stressors can create substantial ill health among people and distress can create considerable dysfunction.

**Modern life style and stress**

This lifestyle is expressed in various behaviours, relationships, working styles, use of leisure, expenditure, fashion and eating habits. Some of the characteristics are: a very busy life, dead-lines to be met, high workload, desire to get ahead and tight competition.

The eating habits of modern life are also changing not only because of the food supply but also because of food patterns: eating in restaurants, use of fast-food, or eating while doing other things. These kinds of lifestyle are sensitive to stress.

If these stressors are perceived as something that threaten a person's well-being, they will generate reactions

such as: palpitations, sweating headache, inability to concentrate. If this is prolonged and experienced intensely, it is understandable that conditions may develop like: high blood pressure, heart attack, stroke, psychosomatic symptoms and depression.

For prevention, stress management can be practiced so that bodily tension can regulate for positive outcomes. This usually consists of the following steps: to acknowledge the presence of stress, to maintain physical health through regular exercise and a healthy diet, to change responses toward stress through yoga, counselling, progressive relaxation, or medication.

**Stress factors in modern urban lifestyles: an Indonesian perspective**

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*Asia Pacific Journal of Clinical Nutrition (1996) Volume 5, Number 3: 135-137***現代都市生活方式的緊張因素：印尼的展望****摘要**

因為現代化和城市化，印尼都市生活的展望是比較明顯的。對比農村和新都市的生活方式，其緊張因素較早年已工業化的都市為大。此外，在已經工業化的城市耶加達（Jakarta），營養的影響，通過工作模式、飲食方式和家庭生活是需要注意的。從醫學生理和醫學心理去探討緊張因素，除營養因素外，還可對其它因素作出正確評價，這些因素包括款式、壓力、關係、體育活動和食物模式。處理這些緊張因素可提供另外的保證健康的機會。

**FAKTOR-FAKTOR STRES DAN POLA HIDUP MODERN DI PERKOTAAN**

Soesmalijah Soewondo

Pola hidup modern yang disebabkan oleh industrialisasi ditandai dengan perubahan-perubahan kehidupan kerja, pola makan dan kehidupan keluarga. Makalah ini menjelaskan pendekatan fisiologi dan psikologi untuk mendefinisikan stres. Identitas berbagai sumber stres telah ditunjukkan dalam berbagai penelitian di Indonesia.

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