

Corso di Psicosomatica

Scheda n. 4

Lo stress

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Per gentile concessione del professor Silvio Merciai, docente al corso di Psicosomatica presso il corso di laurea in Psicologia dell'Università di Torino

Lo stress è il paradigma generale più usato nell'ambito della psicosomatica teorica e clinica, ma anche nella visione e nell'immagine popolare ...

Come scriveva *Stefano Cagliano* sulla rivista *Sapere* (gennaio-febbraio 1989):

Le ricerche sullo stress, sviluppate dallo studioso Hans Selye negli anni '30, hanno avuto recentemente uno sviluppo ragguardevole. Certo nulla a confronto con la magnitudine del successo e della diffusione presso l'opinione pubblica della parola stress, mal compresa e quindi mal impiegata, divenuta ricettacolo delle ansie nostrane di colpevolizzare una società ingrata e ingiusta per tutti i malanni che affliggono l'uomo moderno.

in ciò sulla medesima linea di **Luigi Solano**, che non ne tratta esplicitamente e direttamente, definendolo

termine ...cui non possiamo evitare di fare ancora riferimento [pag.44].

*Lo studente trova un'esauriente esposizione sul concetto classico di stress sul libro di **Trombini-Baldoni**, nel capitolo IX alle pagg. 139-173.*

La letteratura (divulgativa, ma non solo) sullo stress è ovviamente enorme ed altrettanto numerose sono le possibili fonti reperibili su Internet. Ne offro qui di seguito qualche spunto iniziale anche per documentare le osservazioni critiche dianzi riportate:

Scot Meyer, un reporter di HealthScout (che è un servizio di revisione e recensione della letteratura medica) ha di recente pubblicato un articolo The Stress Syndrome all'indirizzo <http://www.healthscout.com/cgi-bin/WebObjects/Af?ap=19&id=107672> che qui riporto quasi per intero:

A stressful job or family life can do more than make you toss and turn all night. It also can make you sick in a variety of ways that you might not expect.

Recent research has shown that stress can affect everything from the healing of wounds to the effectiveness of flu vaccines. That such studies are being done at all shows the extent to which scientific thinking about the effects of stress has changed in the past few years.

"Until recently, scientists and physicians dismissed the idea that stress could make you sick," says Dr. Esther Sternberg, who directs National Institutes of Health research on how brain hormones -- including those the body releases in response to stress -- affect disease.

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*Sternberg says the difference today is that scientists can now measure the effects of stress hormones on the immune system. In her new book, *The Balance Within: The Science Connecting Health and Emotions*, Sternberg writes that stressful events trigger the release of a cascade of hormones and other chemicals that cause your heart to beat faster, your attention to become more focused and your vision to become clearer.*

"But if you prolong the stress, by being unable to control it or making it too potent or long-lived, and these hormones and chemicals continue to pump out from nerves and glands, then the same molecules that mobilized you for the short term now debilitate you," she says.

A number of recent studies have measured this effect, and found strong links between stress and a variety of physical ailments. They include:

- *Adult-onset diabetes. A study conducted at the Vrije Universiteit in Amsterdam found that people who have experienced at least three life-changing events, like the death of a spouse or a financial crisis, were 60 percent more likely to have type II diabetes than their less-stressed counterparts.*
- *Memory impairment. Researchers in Switzerland gave people pills to raise their blood levels of cortisol, a hormone the body produces in response to stress; those people did worse on memory tests than*

members of a control group given placebos.

- *Flu.* An Ohio State University study involving men and women between the ages of 53 and 89 found that those who were under stress because of their roles as caregivers to dementia patients were only half as likely to receive quick protection from flu shots as others less stressed.
- *Wound healing.* Further research at Ohio State found lower concentrations of beneficial immune-system chemicals in the wounds of women under stress. Those wounds took 24 percent longer to heal than similar wounds in women not stressed.

In that last study, Ohio State professor of psychiatry and psychology Janice Kiecolt-Glaser and her colleagues measured immune-system chemicals called cytokines in 36 women who were deliberately given small blisters on their arms. Half the women in the study were caring for relatives with Alzheimer's disease and scored high on standard stress tests: their wounds took about nine days longer to heal.

Kiecolt-Glaser notes in her study that the psychological stress endured by the caregivers, while significant, is not outside the realm of normal experience. "So this doesn't require desperate, terrible stress levels to see effects on the immune system," she says.

Dr. Paul J. Rosch, president of the American Institute of Stress, says other research suggests that stress is linked to heart attacks and hypertension, and can render individuals more susceptible to everything from the common cold and herpes to cancer and AIDS.

Equally troubling, he adds, is that chronic stress appears to be on the rise.

"People don't have enough time or control over their lives," Rosch says. "Too many people are demanding too many things from you, and at the same time there has been a breakdown of normal stress buffers, such as strong family support."

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For more information on stress and its effects on your health, check out the [American Institute of Stress or Kiecolt-Glaser's site.](#)

Più o meno sulle medesime linee e tematiche, sul sito della *Mayo Clinic* all'indirizzo

<http://www.mayohealth.org/home?id=HQ00871>, un breve articolo dal titolo **Thinking About Stress Management**.

Più vicino agli aspetti sociali e popolari del concetto di stress, all'indirizzo

<http://dailynews.yahoo.com/h/nm/20010314/>

[hl/work_1.html](#), si dà notizia della ricerca sull'effetto anticipatore dello stress lavorativo:

While on-the-job stress is a well known and widely felt presence, new research suggests that even thinking about Monday morning may send people's stress hormones upward.

In a study of 75 men and women, UK researchers found that the participants showed steeper increases in the stress hormone cortisol on workday mornings than on days off. Since this rise occurred within 30 minutes of waking up, the mere "anticipation" of work may trigger job-related stress, according to Dr. Andrew Steptoe and his colleagues at University College London.

Discuteremo più avanti nel corso gli aspetti più direttamente clinici del problema dello stress, con riferimento specifico al disturbo post-traumatico da stress, a vari disturbi d'ansia, ai disturbi d'adattamento ed alla depressione.