

THE ROLE OF HUMOUR IN STRESS MANAGEMENT

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Abstract

Humour is said to be a powerful emotion, which gives cognitive experiences that provoke laughter and provide amusement. It has a major impact on one's psychological state. In the emergence of a modern lifestyle, human beings are just rushing towards something which is just materialistic and which is now a leading factor for stress. Stress can generate various emotions such as anxiety, anger, fear, sadness or other such emotions of a negative nature. As a result, the stress generates numerous health and behavioural issues. However, these issues can be combated by substituting positive emotions such as joy, pride, relief, love, compassion, etc., in place of the negative ones. There are many natural therapies to manage stress and one of the simplest, cheapest and the most effective one is humour. This conceptual paper discusses the role of humour in reducing and managing stress.

Keywords: *Humour, Emotions, Stress Management.*

Introduction

“Humour”, the word itself attracts all, thus making it a fascinating topic to write upon. Everyone would have experienced the sense of humour in their lives. Someone tells a joke, relates an amusing personal anecdote, makes a witty comment or an inadvertent slip of the tongue, and we are suddenly struck by how funny it is. Depending on how amusing we perceive the stimulus to be, it might cause us to smile, to chuckle, or to burst out in peals of convulsive laughter. Accordingly we accompany these by pleasant feelings of emotional well-being and mirth, many times during the course of a day.

Humour is a familiar and an enjoyable process (Martin, 2007) which involves a light-hearted and non-serious attitude towards various ideas and events, which in a way plays a vital role in relieving stress to a great extent. 90% of men and 81% of women, all college students, report having a sense of humour is a crucial characteristic looked for in a romantic partner (Hewitt. L, 1958). Humour shouldn't be in a needling way or of a sarcastic variety. It should be in a good enjoyable way that not only we, but also the beings around us feel relieved from stress by the humourous environment that is created.

Etymology and Evolution of Humour

There are many theories and scriptures regarding the evolution of the word humour. In ancient Sanskrit drama, Bharat Muni's Natya Shastra defined humour (*haasyam*) as one of the nine *nava rasas*, (nine emotional responses), which can be inspired in the audience by *bhavas*, the imitations of emotions that the actors perform. Each *rasa* was associated with a specific *bhavas* portrayed on stage. The word humour is also believed to be derived from the Latin word *umor* meaning body fluid. In ancient and medieval physiology, any of the four fluids (blood, phlegm, choler and melancholy or black bile) whose relative proportions were thought to determine physical condition and state of mind. This led to a sense of 'mood, temporary state of mind; the sense of amusing quality, funniness, jocular turn of mind'. Modern French has them as doublets: *humeur* "disposition, mood, whim; humour". The pronunciation of the initial 'h' is only of recent date and is also sometimes omitted.

Scientists believe human laughter evolved from the distinctive panting emitted by our great-ape relatives during rough and tumble play. Non-human primates don't just laugh, but can crack their own jokes (Peter McGraw and Joel Warner, 2014). It was also analyzed by digital recordings of tickle-induced panting from chimps, bonobos, gorillas and orangutans as well as human laughter, that the vocal similarities between the species matched their evolutionary relations (Psychologist Marina Davila-Ross of the University of Portsmouth in the UK).

Positive Effects of Having Sense of Humour

Maintaining a sense of humour in all our lives is very useful for a healthy stress-free lifestyle. Our sense of humour gives us the strength to fight back all the downfalls in our lives and come up with the power of positivity. Of late many laughter club associations are cropping up to artificially enjoy the emotion called as humour. All these are just to reduce the stress levels and maintain it optimally. But when the sense of humour is something within us, instead of going artificial, we should realize its vitality and utilize this beautiful gift of nature to enjoy life. The sense of humour also helps to boost up the will-power in living beings thus extending their lives.

A smile is a curve which sets everything straight (Brainy Quote by Phyllis Diller). This curve can bring various positive vibes to human life. These vibes are also well demonstrated in various movies we come across. Nature has blessed all of us with this emotion of humour, to lead a strong and disease-free life. Some of the overwhelming health benefits are as under:

- *Blood Pressure*- People, who laugh heartily on a regular basis, have a lower standing blood pressure than does the average person.
- *Hormones*- The sense of humour reduces nearly four of the neuro-endocrine hormones associated with stress, namely: epinephrine, cortisol, dopamine and growth hormone.
- *Immune System*- The sense of humour strengthens the immune system by increasing infection-fighting antibodies in our body.
- *Muscle Relaxation*- Belly laughs result in muscle relaxation.
- *Pain Reduction*- Being Humourous allows a person to forget about all his pains, both physical and emotional pains.
- *Brain Function*- The sense of humour stimulates both sides of the brain to enhance learning. It eases muscle tension and psychological stress, which keeps the brain alert and allows people to retain more information.

- *Respiration-* Frequent belly laughter empties our lungs of more air than it takes in, resulting in a cleansing effect, similar to deep-breathing. This deep-breathing sends more oxygen-enriched blood and nutrients throughout the body.
- *The Heart-* An active sense of humour protects us from heart related issues.
- *A Good Workout-* Laughter is considered as ‘internal jogging’. Scientists say that a one minute of laughter is equivalent to ten minutes on the rowing machine. Laughter provides good cardiac, abdominal, facial and back muscle conditioning, especially for those who are unable to perform physical exercise.
- *Mental and Emotional Health-* The sense of humour is a powerful emotional medicine that can lower stress, dissolve anger and unite people in troubled mood. It helps us to come-up and stay balanced even in earth-shaking events in our lives.
- *Problem Solving-* The sense of humour is a magical tool for all of us which provides an ease in solving tough issues and look at things in a positive perspective.
- *Other Benefits-* The sense of humour connects us to each other positively, fosters relationships, rejuvenates and regenerates our energy, thus making us feel good and happy.

Conclusion

Stress, the silent killer has no permanent drug as a reliever. If one insists to get relieved from stress permanently, then one must follow the natural therapies which not only give a permanent relief but also gifts us with added health benefits for a long healthy life. Stress is a disease, not visible to naked eyes. This can be very well treated through the sense of humour. Being humourous is a powerful natural tool for managing stress which can be used irrespective of all the age groups. May it be babies or oldies, humans or other beings (Peter McGraw and Joel Warner, 2014); humour plays a vital role for all in stress management.

As a food is tasteless without spices being added to it, the same way human life becomes dull without the spice called as the sense of humour. Thus, being humourous supports living

beings to enjoy and live life to the fullest. It is good to understand the importance of humour in our lives and dig deeper into the fascinating nature of being humourous, thus enjoying a stress-free lifestyle.

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