



## **STRESS AND COMMUNICATION (I.E. ON STRESS IN COMMUNICATION AND COMMUNICATION UNDER STRESS)**

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The main goal of this research is to determine effective methods for coping with distress and moderating its symptoms. My research was carried out in two directions: it is research penetrating stress theories and relating to famous researchers of the phenomenon in question, such as: Hans H. Selye, Alexander Lowen, Arnie Cann, Alix Kirsta, Henri Rubinstein, Jan F. Terelak and others. Also, it refers to own research and individual ideas originating from respondents' experiences in the scope of dealing with stress. They present their own, often unique methods for dealing with distress. It is to be noted that the methods are usually strongly connected with their personal sensitivity, preferences, temperament as well as the "imprinted habits" ordering them to react and behave in a specific way in a crisis 'situation'. It is to be emphasised that it is not easy to universalise strategies for dealing with stress since different people will react differently to a given strategy. It is worth noticing that the problem of coping (fighting) with stress raised in this work does not mean the attempt to fully eliminate stress from our life. This is especially due to the fact that a certain level of stress, called eustress, is necessary, and even indispensable for correct functioning of human. Such a stress stimulates to action, reinforces necessary existential reactions and increases the threshold of their reactivity. Eustress is also responsible for stimulating human activity, gives life energy and vital force, facilitates carrying out various undertakings and, at the same time, lets human react adequately to a given situation (also in situations of interpersonal communication). It is, then, necessary for activeness, motivation, undertakings as well as good physical and mental state. It turns out, also, that the process of mutual communication is more effective when the communication persons are capable of managing stress and their emotions. What is more, the mood accompanies stress vary often (similarly to the feeling of relax, joy and laugh itself) - the feelings tend to be contagious, which means they are transferred onto the participants of interaction-communication, since the mood is often transferred from one person onto another. Hence, it is assumed that it is worth to maintain a proper, life-giving, and effective level of stress. In everyday life, we do it by taking care of ourselves, our bodies and skilful dealing with its high level. What is incredibly significant is self-awareness, awareness of one's emotions and the ability to express emotions effectively (ability to free from the burden, i.e. to relieve stress). In my work I raise the subject of animating laugh and good physical and mental state in the fight with stress, and present various examples of effective expression of emotions. I also present many ideas - strategies for dealing with distress in order to establish effective mutual communication, which were taken from own experiences of respondents.

**Keywords:** Communication, Stress, Distress, Eustress.

## Introduction

In my thesis I take up the problem of stress in communication and communication under stress. The distinction conventionally accepted by me (*stress in communication* and *communication under stress*), is intended to better illustrate two separate accounts. The first account has been directed at *stress in communication*, which refers directly to mutual communication – to its quality, which mainly turns out to be governed by the level stress that accompanies it. This account illustrates how stress determines the quality of mutual communication - strengthens or weakens its effectiveness and potential. While the second account is directed at *communication under stress*, focuses on people communicating with each other who were under stress, affecting their general well-being, physical sensations and behaviour (in particular as regards mutual communication). First and foremost it is about illustrating reduced people's ability to communicate effectively while they are subjected to stress (which in the context of the collected research material, is reflected in the emotions of the respondents, in their thinking, feelings demonstrated at the level of the body (physical experience), or in their behaviour). The main purpose of my work is to search for effective ways to deal with stressful situations, as well as discover ways to mitigate symptoms of stress. In following the widespread view that the modern human being is increasingly exposed to multiple stressful situations, additionally situations often completely unknown and new, (which is associated with the specificity of the global, and deteriorated world, which exposes man to a variety of influences and provides different stressful stimuli), I assume that it is worth searching, experimenting and opening up to newer solutions, by observing other people, their ideas and drawing from their experience and good, proven practices (although as the research results obtained show, practices assessed as "good" by some, are not good for others).<sup>1</sup> In the longer perspective of research, I look at factors triggering stress (distress in particular), which I examine above all in the context of the mutual communication quality (I turn attention to reducing its effectiveness, as well as the disturbances that accompany it in the communication process in stressful situations). I also show the consequences of such communication that are manifested in the individual dimension, which relate to the condition of people mutually communicating when stress affects them, compare: Apignanesi R, Garrat Ch, (2001), Pennebaker J.W.( 2001), Strumska – Cylwik L.( 2005).<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Stress is increasingly seen as a disease of affluence, connected with a faster pace of living, the fading out of direct interpersonal relationships, a tendency to rush - "living on the run", a very dynamic development of modern technologies, which people often are not able to keep up with and cope with their demands. Stress also causes phenomena such as: unemployment, high competitiveness on the labour market, often poor social protection, which strongly reinforce a sense of uncertainty and instability in people, as well as trigger a number of fears (for example, the fear of losing one's job and livelihood)

<sup>2</sup>It is worth noting that such exposure requires both the involvement of man, as well as a high dose of reflexivity which is necessary to characterize (interpret) one's own condition in the most objective way possible. The term "reflexivity" is understood as both a critical awareness of oneself, the surrounding world, as well as of other people. Reflexivity understood in this way (referred to by Ellen Langer, a psychologist from Harvard University) is linked with "dexterity", which is the opposite of negligence. "Dexterity" describes "thinking" people, conscious, open (who look at the world from multiple perspectives), able to solve problems actively. In contrast to them, thoughtless people hang on tight to specific schemas and are not able to open up to new proposals, new perspectives, to solve problems in unconventional ways. These people are usually eager to flee to blissful negligence, consequently remaining unconscious. As Ellen Langer emphasizes, thoughtlessness and ignorance plays a defensive function at the same time, as it protects people from deep experience, and as a result, causes them to not feel great pain and

## Stress, Its Varieties and Causes for the Formation of Stress

The word stress<sup>3</sup> of Anglo/American origin means strain, force, rapidity, as well as pressure, tension and burden. In psychology, it is described as a state of mental tension, which exceeds a person's normal, i.e. usually occurring, level of functioning (reacting), which in turn leads to imbalance (it is called Distress<sup>4</sup>). Distress generally arises when unfavourable stimuli (a situation causing tension of the organism) repeat themselves too often or when an unpleasant situation lasts too long. Then, excess energy accumulates in the human body, which should be released. If it does not find proper release, it may lead to serious disorders, exhaustion and overload of the body, and in extreme cases to severe illness, and even death. However, in medical terms it is defined as a disorder of homeostasis caused by physical, psychological factors, and sometimes also anatomic or physiological. At the same time, it turns out that in order to restore correct balance and proper psycho-physical functioning, a person must take specific remedial or repairing behaviours. The term stress was first used and applied in the 1930s by the famous Canadian physiopathologist and endocrinologist (of Austrian origin) Hans Hugo Bruno Selye<sup>5</sup>; Selye was first to set the novel hypothesis about the impact of stress on the physical condition of man and its medical consequences. Selye perceived stress as a source of many disorders and somatic diseases. In his opinion, diseases caused by stress are the consequences of the inability of an individual to cope with it, which he defined as failure of the "general adaptation syndrome" (GAS), compare: Selye H. H, (1960, 1978), Pilch T, (2006).<sup>6</sup> In psychology, stress refers to a condition of mental tension, which exceeds the specified normal (i.e. generally adopted) level of functioning, or to a stimulus or situation - known as stressors, which trigger this condition. According to Hans Hugo Selye, who is the pioneer of studying stress, stress should be treated as a natural biological response of the body, and also as a natural part of our everyday life. Due to the fact that it is associated with the processes of life and belongs to natural physiological phenomena. Therefore, the lack of stress responses could be regarded as the death of the

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disappointment (thus sensations associated with stress); however, in return for this, they lose the valuable ability to feel complete happiness, joy, thus they cannot live life to the fullest, Compare: Apiganesi R, Garrat Ch, (2001), Pennebaker J.W.( 2001), Strumska – Cylwik L.( 2005).

<sup>3</sup> Three types of stress can be distinguished: The first refers to a stimulus inducing strong emotions and tension (it is based, among others, on the theories of Glen L. Elliott and Carl Eisdorfer, as well as Thomas Holmes and Richard Rahe); the second refers to both psychological and physiological reactions being a response to a stressful situation (which refers to the concept of Hans Hugo Selye and the homeostatic theory of Walter Bradford Cannon), while the third type treats stress as a transaction or process which describe the relations of a person with his or her environment (e.g. Tadeusz Tomaszewski's concept of difficult situations or Richard Lazarus' transactional model)

<sup>4</sup> In psychology, stress is associated with a dynamic adaptive relationship between the capabilities of a given individual and the requirements of a particular situation (where a stressor or aversive stimulus appears), and which is characterized by the lack of balance

<sup>5</sup> It is worth noting that Hans Hugo Selye, (referred to by the nickname Dr Stress), who has been considered a pioneer in the study of stress, was nominated for a Nobel Prize as an outstanding scientist as many as 10 times, but never ultimately received the award

<sup>6</sup>The general adaptation syndrome(GAS) is in other words a pattern of a body's response to stress, which manifests in "threatening" situations, when the body encounters a particular stressor. Such a pattern constitutes the first line of defence against certain factors, perceived as potentially harmful.; Selye H. H, (1960, 1978), Pilch T, (2006), compare: Website: <http://www.psychologia.edu.pl/slownik/id.ogolny-zespol-adaptacyjny/i.html>, 13.09.2012, time:18.06.

organism. This means that a certain level of stress is necessary for life and the proper functioning of man. Especially, that stress is conducive to activeness and taking up any ventures, better motivation, and at the same time it determines a good frame of mind. Such a positive, life-giving stress is referred to as "*eustress*". "*Eustress*" is considered as a source of positive energy, enhanced vitality of man and necessary biological reactions. It is conducive to man in realizing various activities, tasks and plans. It allows a person to respond adequately to a situation, positively stimulates a person to act and raises the threshold of his or her reactivity. Therefore, man should make sure to maintain proper levels of stress by caring for oneself, one's body and skilfully dealing with stress levels that are too high. It is worth noticing that people experience and react differently to individual stress stimuli. It turns out that a stimulus which has a neutral effect on one person (such a neutral stimulus is defined as a Neustress), can be eustressful or distressful for another person, compare: Kirsta A, (1998) <sup>7</sup>

### Ways of Dealing with Distress

In order to effectively deal with "increased" stress energy is necessary, which every healthy person comes into this world with, and which is located, according to Hans Hugo Selye, in the "adrenaline bank". At the same time, every individual decides how they will manage and use this energy and possessed potential. Care about one's own health, psychophysical hygiene, which is accompanied by rational nutrition, rest, healthy sleep, doing sports, proper relations with other people and the ability to effectively communicate with them<sup>8</sup> fosters long use of energy needed for daily struggles. Also, positive thinking and a positive attitude towards life, as well as good

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<sup>7</sup>It is understood that dealing with stress is more effective the greater the harmony and balance in our daily lives. When dealing with stress, factors that determine the level of stress and quality of a person's everyday life are significant. The lifestyle adopted by an individual proves particularly important. A lifestyle protecting a person against stress requires: the ability of being oneself (in accord with oneself, with one's own values), as well as the capacity and openness to change, to build fruitful relations, relationships (also communicative) with other people, mastering the art and organization of work (this applies to both working time and free time) - it is important that correct proportions are maintained, satisfaction with work, the quality of the working environment, the quality of living space, environment (the environment of our lives, our standard of living: our house, neighbourhood, architecture of rooms and their furnishing, space), a proper diet and physical activity for good form and mental and physical health (healthy diet, outdoor activities, the ability to relax, etc.). Daily rest is very important, which causes desired changes in the body. These changes are at the same time opposite to phenomena triggering reactions of "struggle and escape", with which man responds when stress emerges. They are caused by two opposing parts of the nervous system, namely: by the sympathetic nervous system, which slows down body functions and the parasympathetic system, which stimulates bodily functions. They maintain a balance by controlling body temperature, respiration, heart function, digestion processes, blood circulation, as well as the functioning of muscles. The parasympathetic system helps to reduce the consumption of oxygen and release of carbon dioxide, slow down breathing and the heartbeat, lower blood pressure and reduce the content of cortisol in the blood, compare: Kirsta A, (1998).

<sup>8</sup> The quality of relations with other people and communicating with them are heavily correlated with stress that accompanies man. Especially when a person cannot cope with stress and the feelings that accompany or cause it. Stress can then seriously disrupt human reactions when in contact with others. These can be very extreme reactions, from withdrawal from mutual interaction (passivity, discomfort, shyness, submissions that often block mutual interactions and blur their true image) to aggressive behaviour (attacking, manipulating, malice, insult, or demoting others), which in extreme cases, lead to interruption of mutual interactions, compare: Kirsta A, (1998).

spirits, and, in particular, laughter<sup>9</sup> prevent or significantly reduce and relieve stress and its negative effects (which is also reflected in the collected research material - see: Own research characteristics). While improper handling of man's possessed potential contributes to the rapid loss of energy, and consequently to the loss of (widely understood) health. It is worth noting that animating laughter in mutual relations proves to have very important meaning, as laughter not only builds positive relations with other people, but is also acknowledged as a natural "medicine", which improves our health, mental and physical condition, extends our youth and life. Smiling and laughter can be thus seen as a form and way to establish bonds with other people, and build mutual relationships and relations with them (also communicative). At the same time, these ties and relationships are needed to people, so that they feel happy and manifest it to the world. This is mentioned by Robert Provine, who noticed that people laugh thirty times more often when they meet (i.e. remain in contact) with other people than when they are alone, even though they are in the same situations that stimulate laughter. It turns out that the people like to share laughter and joyful atmosphere with others. Research indicates that only 15% of laughter comes from a funny situation, or a joke, while a significant increase of such a trend can be observed in social relationships (in the presence of other people). This is reflected in the results of an experiment that was conducted in which participants of the study watched the same movie alone and in the company of other people. It turned out that depending on whether they did this on their own, or among others, they reacted to it very differently. The frequency of laughter and its length and intensity were greater when the movie was screened in the presence of another person or people (it made no difference whether this person was a friend or a stranger), than when the respondent watched it alone. In view of the above, it can be assumed that it is worth not only to care about stimulating laughter, but also animating situations in which people will be able to collectively express their joy, good spirits and share them with each other. It is also worth noting that laughter stimulates the human body to secrete natural painkillers – endorphins, which stimulate good spirits. The increased release of endorphins helps unload stress, as well as supports the recovery process, and sometimes even contributes to complete recovery, compare: Pease A. & Pease B, (2007) Bevin N, (2000), and Strumska- Cylwik L, (2012).<sup>10</sup> According to Paul Ekman, people who smile and laugh attract others. This is because

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<sup>9</sup>As Alexander Lowen emphasizes, laughter releases tension, therefore, it can be treated both as a means of preventing stress, as well as treating it, which not only improves one's mood and elevates spirit, but additionally alleviates the negative effects of stress. This happens, because when we laugh spontaneously and sincerely, tension is released through movements of the muscles and the entire body. Arnie Cann - a professor of psychology (at the University of North Carolina) provides a similar observation, indicating that humour and laughter has a positive effect on one's frame of mind and counteracts stress. Studies carried out on people who have been diagnosed with first stage depression enabled to derive interesting insights. The respondents were divided into two groups. Each of the groups for the next three weeks watched videos (one group exclusively comedies, the second, other genres). It turned out that the people in the group watching comedies showed significant improvement in health, which was not the case in the second group of respondents, see: Lowen A, (1990), Pease A. & Pease B, (2007).

<sup>10</sup> There are known cases of complete healing through "laughter therapy". A spectacular example is the case of Norman Cousins (an American journalist, writer and literary critic, and lecturer at the School of Medicine at the University of California, where he did research on the biochemistry of human feelings, believing that they are the key to success in the struggle against diseases), who was diagnosed by doctors with an incurable disease (ankylosing spondylitis), which was supposed to progress in terrible pain and suffering and lead to a significant limitation of the patient's mobility, and consequently death. Doctors were powerless against the diagnosed disease and expressed their inability to treat it further. At this news, Cousins decided to make the most of the rest of his life. He decided to

the sight of a joyful and smiling face affects the vegetative nervous system of a person, who in seeing a smile - responds with a smile, therefore, releases endorphins in his or her own body. However, this principle also works in the opposite direction, that in contact (being) with a "gloomy" person, as a rule, we reflect it and take over their mood, which in turn has a negative effect, thus increases the risk of stress. Also, an irrational lifestyle in the form of sleepless nights, uneaten meals, lack of physical activeness - the energy located in the "adrenaline bank" depletes very quickly. Negligence of the psychological and emotional sphere acts in a similar way, and they can be found to be serious in their consequences. Negative thinking<sup>11</sup> or worrying (reflected in inefficient and unproductive thinking, for example: "I'm hopeless", "I won't cope", "I won't pass that exam", etc.), also significantly minimise chances of successful completion and of a healthy, satisfactory life. Because they cause man to see only ways out that lead to negative solutions, and erase any paths leading to successful solutions. Such thinking absorbs too high amounts of adrenaline, because it keeps the human body in a state of continuous readiness to receive threats, which as a result plunges it into constant distress, ruining mental and physical health.<sup>12</sup> As a consequence, man becomes tense and sad, which usually results in a sour face. Such a sour face acts in scaring people away, who usually avoid potential "glooms", "wretches", in order to avoid the effect of "transferring" their moods onto themselves. It is interesting to note that such a "sour face" can set on the face permanently in the form of grooves, wrinkles and "sculpted" grimaces on the face. Experiments conducted show that women with sad facial

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spend it in cheer, thus he funded himself stay at a hotel, rented all the Marx Brothers comedies (which were to trigger in him a positive attitude, faith, hope, laughter) and watched them constantly, laughing out loud at the same time, "until he burst"; additionally he administered huge doses of vitamin C. He noticed that ten minutes of authentic, "sincere" laughter ensured him at least two hours of painless sleep... After six months of "laughter therapy", the patient recovered completely. The effect of recovery prompted Cousins to write a book titled: "Anatomy of an Illness". Although the diagnosis was later repeatedly challenged (its authenticity was questioned claiming that perhaps it was only reactive arthritis, and not ankylosing spondylitis), this story launched studies on the functions of endorphins released under the influence of laughter, and later studies of researchers have confirmed their "healing power", therefore, modern medicine treats laughter very seriously. Laughter therapy is called Gerontology (from the Greek - gelos - laughter). In the 1980s, the concept of "laughter rooms" was introduced in some American hospitals, where comedy recordings, movies, funny books were placed, and even clowns were invited. Patients were sent to the "laughter rooms" each day for at least 30-60-minute sessions. The results achieved proved to be spectacular; significant improvement in the health of many patients was observed. Currently, similar practices are being introduced all over the world. In Poland similar activities are being applied in children's hospitals, particularly in child oncology wards, among others, at Warsaw's children's hospitals, where the programme of the foundation called "Dr Clown" operates, compare: Pease A. & Pease B., (2007), Bevin N., (2000), and Strumska- Cylwik L., (2012).

<sup>11</sup> our state of mind proves to be extremely important for health. Negative thinking usually entails negative behaviour and other negative effects, leading to low self-esteem, neuroticism, a tendency for hypersensitivity and excessive focus on oneself, a tendency to pessimism, and the conviction of one's own ineptitude, as well as feelings of guilt (usually disproportionate and inadequate to the situation), compare: *Depression and apathy. How to deal with it*. Materials for educators, psychologists and parents (film), PWN, Warsaw, 1997.

<sup>12</sup>In addition to health costs caused by stress, stress costs seen from the economic perspective also seem significant. For example, in the United States, it is assumed that such costs are at the level of 75 milliard per year (of which 30 milliard dollars is absorbed by costs associated with coronary artery disease, which is mainly caused by stress). In the United Kingdom an estimated 55 million pounds a year is spent on treating diseases caused by stress, see, Kirsta A., (1998).

expressions are often perceived as less attractive. The lack of a smile on women's faces was generally interpreted as a sign of unhappiness, while in men, it was typically read as a sign of dominance. It is worth noting that, from a psychological and physiological point of view, laughter and crying<sup>13</sup> are closely linked (and at the same time play a similarly significant role in the release from tension and stress), which is clearly manifested by young children, who quickly pass from one state to another and often intertwine them with one another – for the child naturally and easily goes from sobbing to vigorous laughter and vice versa. Both laughter and crying turn out to be very helpful to man in maintaining internal balance and health. At the same time, it appears that, in everyday life, it is very important to maintain balance in the level of everyday stress that accompanies the human being in his or her everyday struggles. It is about maintaining balance between too few and too many (overwhelming) stimuli. It turns out that in situations when the stress level is too low, a decrease in motivation to act occurs, a drop in attention span, the tendency towards apathy intensifies, as does a bad mood, withdrawal, boredom, and consequently, sometimes also depression. However, too high stress levels, causing high psychophysical tension turns out to be equally destructive as its deficiency. It may cause various disorders like: the feeling of anxiety, terror, panic, chaos, confusion, or difficulty in concentrating. However, when such a state of high tension lasts a longer period of time, it can lead to a number of dangerous somatic diseases. Because the impact of distress on the human body and his general well-being is particularly negative and generally means that the stream of stimuli has exceeded the specific limit of a given person (such a limit is very individual - it is different for different people). Samy Molcho draws attention to the existence of a series of stressful reactions to unfriendly stimuli, which are generally caused by disappointment with oneself or with the world. Such situations manifest themselves even in young children, in the form of a reaction of attack, escape, search for help, hiding, or having to comply with another person. Sometimes they also take the form of having to subordinate to a particular situation. It is worth noting, however, that ways in which they are expressed are different in adults and in children. Children treat received impressions in a holistic way; therefore, they confuse physical laws with moral rights, and determinism with duty. For example, they assign experiences and thoughts they experience themselves to animals, but when they explain certain phenomena, they refer to their own view of the world, own activity - following their own imagination, intuition, and not the laws of logic. That is why a child reacts to stressful (problematic) situations

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<sup>13</sup>According to Alexander Lowen, crying, like laughter, has healing properties, as it releases accumulated tension, suppressed feelings and brings a person relief and solace. It also makes our heart healthier. When we cry hard, sobbing occurs, which is like a pulsating that arises deep in the abdomen, and then moves up to the chest and towards the throat, after which it is released in the form of sound. To make such a sound, it is necessary to exhale heavily. This means that without exhalation (especially when we hold our breath), such a cry becomes impossible. Also tension in the throat and the jaws block sound, as a result, inhibiting crying, which in turn leads to accumulating tension. However, when a person cries out, a feeling of lightness occurs in the chest, and breathing becomes much easier. On the other hand, when we suppress tensions and feelings, we close our heart, and only an open heart is a healthy heart: "as long as I can cry, I know that my body is relaxed, and my heart is open". For one to cry sincerely and spontaneously, however, they must learn to succumb to sadness, because only then can they fully open up and thus release the deep pain that "broke the heart". Such pain is located in a clenched jaw, tight throat, stiffened chest (from pain and stress), in stiffened abdomen. The result is that our whole body is blocked by toxic energy (trapped in us). That is why it is emphasized, not without reason, that, when one hurts one's finger, pain is limited exclusively to the area of injury, while in emotional injury, pain emanates onto the entire body, see: Lowen A, (1990).

differently to adults. An adult usually "hides" or shields from a problem by disownment, consciously or unconsciously applying the "ostrich" strategy. A child in a similar situation (if feeling uncomfortable, afraid) covers or closes its eyes, which constitutes a symbolic act of isolating oneself from the outside world. This behaviour is linked with hope that the problem will solve itself and disappear - because if I can't see it, it means it's not there. Children often behave in such a way when they feel too much pressure from the environment, when they suffer from excessive demands required of them, too high expectations, (Samy Molcho). It is generally assumed that coping with stress largely depends on the individual human characteristics (which psychology, psychophysiology explains broadly) and social determinants. In this context, knowledge about stress, especially about ways of dealing with it, is found particularly important. Such knowledge is completed by the preventive and psycho-corrective function, thereby contributes to a better and more effective functioning of the human being in the world, and to an improvement of his well-being. As a result, it also fosters higher quality of a person's relations with other people (including communicative relations). There exists a concept of stress that pays attention to the adaptive ability of man to broadly perceived change, which results from the instinct of life and acquired skills (properties) that man assimilates in the course of an individual life. They allow a person not only to survive, but also deal with the pressure of everyday life, which is associated with stress, Molcho S,(2008), Pease A. &Pease B,(2007), Terelak J.F., (2001), Pilch, (2006.), Hans Hugo Selye H.H, (1960, 1978), Kirsta A, (1998).

### Characteristics of own research

The subject of own research presented<sup>14</sup> is *stress in communication* and *communication under stress* (the meaning of which was explained in the introduction). While the main objective is to seek effective ways to deal with distress and relieve its symptoms. I also tried to determine how stress affects people communicating with each other (their mental, physical, and emotional health, their behaviour, etc.) and how this consequently impacts the quality of mutual

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<sup>14</sup>The presented research on: *Stress in communication and communication under stress* constitute a part of a larger project (concerning *emotions in communication* - focusing on examining emotions like: joy, fear, anger, sadness, etc.). The studies were conducted in the years 2011-2012. 108 people (both women and men aged 19-73 years old, coming from diverse social backgrounds) participated in the studies. Among them were full-time students - volunteers (18 people) of 3rd year studies at the Faculty of Social Sciences - fifth semester (specialization: social animation, guidance and counselling pedagogy, as well as early education with English). It is worth noting that students took a double role here: both as subjects and researchers, which means that they had the opportunity to experience the role of respondents before they became researchers (which aimed to introduce them properly and prepare them for the role of researcher, and above all avoid certain consequences, attributed to "second circulation" studies, see: Łobocki M, (2001). Therefore, such a procedure was not accidental; it was about increasing research competences of young researchers, whose job was to examine five people each from their nearest environment (these people were selected by them freely. It is worth noting that the selection of respondents over the age of 19 years old was intentional (in the conducted study, maturity and experience was essential, which are usually acquired with age). The students were informed about the principles and ethics in the scope conducting studies properly. Each student-researcher was familiarized with the instructions to carry out the study and signed a declaration of consent for using the research conducted by them for scientific purposes. The researchers were also briefed on the content of the declaration of confidentiality (which ensures secrecy and proper use of research material). The declaration was signed by each of the persons. The studies conducted (qualitative in nature) were anonymous, and their interpretation was conducted on the basis of the interpretative paradigm.



communication. My research was based on well-known theories of stress, drawn from recognized researchers of this phenomenon, as well as on own research, which is based on the experiences of respondents who revealed their personal entanglements with stress and their own strategies for dealing with it. In the conducted studies<sup>15</sup>, however, I do not use typical, thus commonly known tools for measuring stress (based primarily on psychology and physiology) like: the questionnaire by Lazarus and Folkman, as the specificity of own research (oriented at studying various aspects of stress related to the issue of communication) required the use of specific tools. In my own research I used a questionnaire of seven unfinished sentences<sup>16</sup> (the idea was taken from psychological projection techniques (from the so-called unfinished sentences tests)).<sup>17</sup> An attachment of interpretations (justifications) was also used,<sup>18</sup> which in its

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<sup>15</sup>It is worth noting that research on stress is carried out at three separate (and at the same time correlated with each other) levels, namely: the social level, the psychological, and the physiological level (they play an important role in measurements concerning coping with stress). The most well-known tools of measuring stress (recognized as a process) is the questionnaire by Richard Lazarus and Susan Folkman (1984), from which the transactional theory of stress and coping with stress emerged, where coping with stress was determined by factors such as: health, energy, a person's positive attitude towards life, his or her ability to solve problems, the degree of socialization (expressed at the same time in the context of human susceptibility to social support), financial status, the person's personality and temperament, as well as environmental constraints resulting from the development of civilization in the country (place), where one lives.

<sup>16</sup>In the questionnaire (own development) I used the following unfinished sentences: 1. When I'm under strong stress, the following emotions usually accompany me (...); 2. When I'm under strong stress, I observe body signals like (...); 3. When I'm under strong stress, the following thoughts usually accompany me (...); 4. When I'm under strong stress, I usually behave (say, do); 5. Strong stress causes my communication with other people to become (...), so others (...); 6. To protect mutual communications against the adverse effects of stress (...); 7. My most effective way of dealing with stress is (...), because (...)

<sup>17</sup>Primarily, the task of projection (verbal) techniques (verbal) is associating words, completing sentences or responding to questions. With them, the respondent can comfortably and freely express his or her feelings, reactions, opinions and needs. In such studies, the respondent gives the material that is ambiguous in nature its individual meaning sense and meaning. Projection methods, in its basic concept, are based on the assumption that any tasks that give a person the opportunity to free thinking, associations, picturing, foster better extraction of deeply hidden (unconscious) desires, wishes, needs, aversions, traumas, emotional attitudes, personality traits, thanks to which we get better insight into the real world and its values, as well as the deep structures of his or her personality. The technique of unfinished sentences used in this study, however, has a different application (that the one presented above). This is not to penetrate deeply and decrypt the personality traits of respondents (which is generally done by appropriate specialists: psychiatrists, psychologists), but rather a deepening of their own awareness of communication with other people, while they are subjected to stress. Awareness is associated here with the self, which refers to what "I" am experiencing, thinking, feeling, seeing, etc. compare Pieter J,(2004), Zimbardo P. G.(2000). It is self awareness, which means that a person is aware of who he/she is, what he/she does, what he/she says and how he/she feels. It means the ability to inspect oneself, i.e. self-consciousness - the ability to be in touch with oneself – which is an essential ingredient of a healthy personality. Thanks to it we become able to self-analyze and we are able to better care about how other people receive us. At the same time, I assume that the narratives of the respondents arising from the act of spontaneous disclosure and discovering first associations create a screen, on which a projection occurs (understood as transmitting outwards) of their own experiences and mental qualities, but additionally, their interpretation takes place, which is done by the respondents themselves (in the attachment to the questionnaire). The verbalization of their own experiences made through the test of unfinished sentences and its interpretation, becomes a certain act of selfanalysis, due to the fact that respondents not only obtain better insight

assumption, was to serve the interpretation of respondents' statements (thus being a complementary tool for the questionnaire); while interpretations were made by the respondents themselves, which in this study is a deliberate and intentional procedure (it is worth noting here that the subjects received attachments after completing the questionnaires of unfinished sentences)<sup>19</sup>. I base on the assumption that while completing the test, and in particular while interpreting it, the respondents turned on their narrative and autonarrative thinking<sup>20</sup>, which

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into the events (experiences) of the past, thus they can better understand them, but also get the opportunity to explore solutions to specific problems. At the same time, such verbalization of own experiences creates conditions for releasing accumulated psychological tension and releasing suppressed feelings, which is a kind of a *catharsis*, allowing a person to free himself from them instead of keeping them in. As observed by James Pennebaker, in a situation when suppression lasts too long, it can affect the human body, similarly to a long-lasting stressor, which invokes a number of psychosomatic ailments. At the same time, the greater the effort that is required to suppress, the greater stress it is for the body. It is worth noting that such suppression also affects a person's thinking, generally causing a significant reduction in the ability to think freely. In my research, I assume that in a number of cases, the respondents can best assess and interpret their experiences, as they occurred in contexts that are known only to them (and to which often nobody but them has access), which seems relevant if we assume that true meaning of an experience is built by contexts in which a given experience was created. It is worth emphasizing here that the projection methods (tests) have many critics and opponents, who stress that the material for interpretation provided by respondents is difficult to assess objectively, as it is very susceptible to distortion; therefore, various researchers, often interpret the same material in various ways, compare: Pilch T, Bauman T, (2001), Pieter J, (2004),. Zimbardo P. G,(2000), Pennebaker J.W, (2001).

<sup>18</sup>The attachment presented constitutes an integral part of the questionnaire and is its complement (although, as previously explained, it was filled in separately, after the respondents filled in the questionnaire). Respondents were asked to interpret (justify) their earlier statements, which they gave by filling in the questionnaire of seven unfinished sentences, (the questionnaire was left to be accessed when making its interpretations). Respondents were asked to refer to their statements in the questionnaire, along with the following: Explain (justify) your statements in the questionnaire: 1. Why do you respond in such a way when you are under strong stress? (What causes you to have such an emotional reaction and not another, specified physical sensations, thoughts, behaviours? - give specific examples); 2. Why does your communication with other people (when you are under strong stress) take on such a form? What according to you causes others to react that way? Justify your statement in which you refer to actions taken in order to protect mutual communication against the adverse effects of stress). It is worth noting that in the presented attachment of justifications, justification to point number 7 from the questionnaire was omitted, because the respondents justified their statements straight away in the questionnaire.

<sup>19</sup> The procedure of separating in time the questionnaire of unfinished sentences from the attachment of interpretations was intentional. The aim was to extract from respondents the most spontaneous and honest answers, as well as to avoid manipulating them so that they matched the justifications provided. It is worth noting that both the questionnaire and the attachment were anonymous.

<sup>20</sup> Terms: narrative and autonarrative thinking was introduced by Jerome Bruner. Narrative thinking describes how information is processed by humans, which consists in cognitive construction of a story. Because of them, a person gives a specific structure to his(her) own thoughts, observations and experiences, or events. Therefore, the narrative becomes a way of understanding the surrounding world - a means of expressing thoughts, feelings, experiences. Man naturally imposes a narrative structure to the surrounding world, by placing various events and own experiences in a specific space-time order, in which both he and other people become the protagonists of the story told. Each story contains a specific beginning, middle, and ending. Although the research presented in this paper does not cite particular stories in their entirety (these are known only to their protagonists), they allow the protagonists themselves to understand them better, look at them better, and give them a specific narrative structure.

seems to have particular importance in the context of the applied method and the selfanalysis occurring within it (thanks to which by analyzing their own reactions, behaviours, actions, experiences, the respondents constructed a life story in a cognitive way). The most representative and typical categories were selected from the collected research material. The basis for their selection were statements of respondents and indications quoted most often, arising both on the basis of first associations, as well as justifications assigned to them. Mentioned are also statements of respondents, which proved to be somewhat unique, for example, particularly original, unusual or unique, which brought with it a new quality and value to the presented research results (especially in terms of presented strategies of coping with strong stress, which is reflected in point number 7 of the questionnaire). In the first unfinished sentence of the questionnaire (*see: point 1*), where the subjects refer to emotions that accompany them during strong stress (distress), they most commonly evoke emotions like: *anger, rage, a sense of powerlessness, the feeling of anxiety (fear, panic), sadness (despair)*. They call to attention that in their bodies (*see point 2*), they then most often observe signals like: *an accelerated heartbeat (e.g. they mention that their heart beats hard like "crazy", or they speak of an irregular heartbeat); they also feel a general jitteriness (shaking arms, legs, breaking and trembling voice, the whole body quivering or only arms and legs)*. Some subjects (although a minority) *mention the paralyzing effects of stress on their body (they talk of the whole body or its part stiffening, "freezing" (paying particular attention to the muscles of the neck, shoulders, arms, back and sore neck)*; some of the respondents also observe the loss of energy in their body and the accompanying sense of lack of vitality, which sometimes even leads to paralysing immobility, consisting in the inability to perform the simplest tasks (the simplest moves, gestures). At the same time, respondents often notice *disturbed breathing (accelerated breathing, shallower and shorter breathing, the feeling of shortness of breath, or tightness or pain in the chest, and even temporary apnoea - stopped breathing: "my body freezes and cannot breathe", "I lose my breath and stiffen up completely", "I have a feeling that I can't breathe", "I feel pain in the chest and feel like I'm going to suffocate", "I must take a deep breath, or yawn, to balance breathing")*. They also observe: *sweating skin, dry mouth, gastric problems (such as: the feeling of the stomach contracting, stomach contraction connected with pain, disturbed intestinal peristalsis, diarrhoea or fecal retention), as well as oppression (or weight) in the chest, increased (too frequent) urination, tightening throat and change of voice (generally an elevated voice is observed, a more squeaky voice, or a hoarse voice, often also sleeping disorders)*. However, *physical reactions of the body are not always the same (identical) for all people. This is proven, among others, by differences observed on the respondents' faces, where some claim that their faces redden, while others notice that their faces become pale, white, or even blue. Some claim that the blood rushes to their heads (pulsating in their head, or even bursting it), while others feel that blood departs from their heads. In both cases, the subjects often complained about headache, the feeling of pressure in the head or the illusion of a heavy head. Another difference in symptoms observed by the respondents concerns the feeling of their own hands. Some claim that their hands become damp and cool, others that moist and cold, while in other still, only their*

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Because the process of understanding reality is carried out through the search for meaning in ongoing events, experiences, which man recognizes in categories of a specific narrative thread, a specific story. Autonarrative thinking, however, is to foster articulation and reference to one's own insights about specific events (experience), phenomena, or problems. Reconstructing them fosters the activation of intellectual processes and own experiences, which participate both in the organization of getting to know oneself, as well as in getting to know one's relation to the surrounding world, or other people, see: Trzebiński J, (2002) ,compare: Klus – Stańska, D,(2002).

temperature changes. Similar differences can be seen in sleep disorders that occur, where some subjects (the vast majority), said they have trouble with falling asleep, or quickly wake, while others cannot sleep at all, and another group notice that they sleep longer, and they can even "sleep through" their problem (the stressful situation). It is worth noting that for the majority of respondents, a very difficult task, (sometimes even an impossible one) turned out to be completing the sentence (in point 3) in which the subjects had to note the thoughts which appeared when under strong stress. Therefore, the most common statements were: "my thinking then is completely disturbed, stress causes the blood to leave my head and I'm not able to think logically"; "I'm not able to think with a clear head then, my memory is disturbed"; "I can't remember any specific thoughts"; "I don't know what I think then, because there is chaos in me and strong emotions"; "my thoughts are chaotic, dominated by emotions and i can't replay them", "I work like a machine then, on impulse". A few respondents who managed to refer back to their thoughts during stress, as a rule characterized them in a very general and schematic way, describing them as "negative thoughts", "pessimistic thoughts", "bad thoughts", "gloomy thoughts", which is illustrated by the following statements: "under strong stress, I concentrate and think mainly about the people and situations that caused the stress in me, and I don't have very positive thoughts"; "they are usually bad thoughts, I don't think well of myself and others"; "my thoughts are rather pessimistic, filled with the feeling of guilt, especially when it's me that did something wrong. However, when someone else is to blame, then I think that I was wounded and I feel a grudge towards him." Interesting insights are also provided by the statements to (point number 4), where the respondents characterize their behaviours (both verbal and non-verbal) while they are subjected to stress. Additionally, these statements are some of the most extensive and comprehensive among those presented so far. One can get the impression that the subjects do not have significant problems or doubts in this respect; therefore, they easily describe their own behaviours. Also, these statements give us a lot of valuable information about the respondents, their feelings, own experiences, events and how they react in various situations. The most frequently invoked behaviours here include aggressive behaviour (based on attack): screaming, talking loudly, attempting to be louder than their partner's (or partners') communication, interrupting someone, provoking utterances (aggressive, sarcastic, ironic, depreciating others), which are often accompanied by aggressive faces (facial expressions), aggressive, hostile gestures that sometimes (albeit rather rarely) turn into violent and destructive behaviour, like: pushing, pushing away, jostling, kicking (something or someone), destroying various objects: "in such a state I often provoke other people to a strong exchange of opinions or even a quarrel", "I look for an excuse to quarrel or brawl, often maliciously tease someone, make silly faces", "I willingly go on a war path with others", "I can be mean, once I even kicked the dog". Second were behaviours illustrating withdrawal of the respondents from further relations (communication), resulting from the mechanism of running away, like: (withdrawing from a conversation without finishing it, isolating oneself from others, avoiding the company of other people, especially when it is accompanied by the fear of people, etc.) In the group of these behaviours, the following also appear: crying, avoiding eye contact, disorders at the level of verbal communication, and at the same time distorting the mutual relationship: chaotic utterances, slurred speech, stuttering, repeating words or their endings or skipping words or their endings, etc. Statements in the questionnaire (in point 5), indicate that mutual communication (when the people communicating are under strong stress) becomes: nervous, disorganized, disturbed, pointless, uncontrolled, inefficient, "dry", it often turns into a sharp exchange of views, an argument, or even results in breaking off the relationship. However, at this point, the subjects quite often indicate that the shape of such communications depends

largely on who they are communicating with and where they are at that time (because it depends on this whether they make a smaller or bigger effort) to restrain and control their reactions (emotions, behaviours), or if they allow themselves for unfettered expression: "my communication with other people depends on the situation. When I talk with the boss at work, I can't afford to shout or even raise my voice, because I don't want to be fired; besides it's not right to behave that way to a superior. But, when I am at home, then quite often I happen to explode and I usually yell, pick on anything and let off my steam at anyone I come across, especially those who are closest, mostly household members, the wife and children". Especially since they always understand me and forgive me"; *"my communication with other people becomes unfriendly then, although I try to hide my negative mood and attitude, especially when I'm talking to a stranger or someone important. But it doesn't always work"; "Usually my loved ones are scolded, because I don't have to pretend anything in front of them, I can be myself, besides, I know that family always turns a blind eye to such behaviours(...)"*. However, it turns out that uncontrolled behaviour (especially aggressive) entails certain consequences. They usually cause others to react (behave): *like me, they become unfriendly, react aggressively, hostile, arrogant, they feel uncomfortable, they are troubled, stop the conversation, do not want to continue talking, withdraw from further communication, etc.* A small group of respondents, as is evident from the statements (*in point 6*), take up effective (satisfying themselves) remedial actions to protect mutual communication, against the adverse effects of stress. For most emphasize that they are influenced by: *impulse, strong emotions, or under the influence of the moment, and therefore their actions rarely turn out to be rational, efficient, effective, and satisfying.* The following kinds of statements appear here: *"I withdraw from further conversation"; "I don't continue the conversation"; "I cut off further discussion"; "I don't do much in this regard"* etc. Only a few respondents cite examples that show that they are able to control the situation and prevent the escalation of tension, so as to effectively protect mutual communications against the adverse effects of stress: *"I try to control myself. When it get nervous, I usually try to turn a given situation into a joke so that nobody feels offended and usually it works quite well"; "If it is possible I say that I'm having a bad day or mood and try to postpone a meeting to another time to continue calmly once I calm down, without the whole stressful aura"; "I usually try to explain what state I'm in, how I feel and why. Sometimes when I get everything off my chest, when I simply talk to someone, I feel better, the stress then leaves me and things start to work out better, and the conversation just falls into place (...)"*. The last responses in the questionnaire, concerning the most effective ways of coping with stress, were presented by respondents *in point number 7*, which as the only point in the questionnaire, has been deprived of direct relations to the issue of communication, and despite this, its link with communication proved to be obvious, which is confirmed by the vast majority of statements obtained in the questionnaire and in the presented justifications. According to them, the majority of respondents not only have favourite, "tested" strategies of coping with stress, but also are conscious that using appropriate strategies improves both one's own (broadly understood) state, frame of mind, as well as the condition of mutual relations (mutual communication). In this, a group of respondents associates the use of strategies with own habits, habits of reacting, which cause that in certain crisis situations they reach for them almost automatically. It also worth noting that not all strategies are considered effective by respondents; that they can be recommend to others without hesitation. Some of them may raise serious doubts. Especially those that seem to carry with them a high risk of health deterioration, or even death, or seriously threaten relations with other people (as referred to by some respondents: *getting drunk, fast, crazy driving, risky sex or gambling*). It may also be worth pointing out that some (few) respondents find it difficult to choose just one strategy out of the

broad range of offers they possess. Those respondents stress that the decision about which offer they choose depends on a number of factors: their mood and condition on a given day, the type of stress that accompanies them, and (broadly understood) external conditions, especially when those turn out to be unfavourable and do not allow them to comfortably use their chosen strategy at a given time (usually the lack of time was indicated, combined with spending most of the day at work or doing a task that needed to be finished quickly and on time). The analysis of the collected research material, allows to observe that the most frequently mentioned strategies - dealing with the *first position* on the list of singled out categories, are widely popular strategies for coping with stress, referring primarily to (the broadly understood) hygienic lifestyle, where respondents stress the importance of factors such as: *relaxing, healthy sleep, contact with nature, physical exercise (including, outdoor activities, walks and then jogging, the gym, fitness, aerobics, etc.), healthy, rational eating and limiting or quitting stimulants*. However, noteworthy is the fact that despite the fact that respondents referred to such strategies as their most effective in fighting off stress, and the most commonly practiced strategies by them, sometimes they observed that they do not use them sufficiently. On the next, *second position*, strategies appeared that were based on contacts and relations with other people, where direct presence of another person and harmonious relations with others turns out to be necessary. Respondents emphasize here that to effectively deal with stress, they need other people: *a conversation with them, support, companionship, being with others, friendship, love, trust, hugging someone, physical closeness (sex), working together, etc.* Some in this group even emphasized that they like to be among a wider crowd of people: *with friends, with family, with a pack of friends, surrounded by many different people, and even in a crowd among strangers, or even in complete turmoil (a disco, rock concert, a game at a stadium)*. This group also includes some who, though they resign from direct contact with others, they still meet with them indirectly, for example: *via telephone, on social networks, or in another way communicating via the Internet*. In the next singled out *third position*, there were people who indicated that in stressful situations they need: *loneliness, isolation, peace and quiet, (separation) or just temporary fencing off from others, the possibility to be with oneself - to calm down, etc.* At the same time, a surprising phenomenon in a separate group of people (who clearly indicate that in stressful situations, they opt for privacy), there appeared statements that seem to contradict such a declaration. Because some of those people simultaneously indicated that they contact other people via the Internet or telephone, it can be assumed that indirect contact is not always treated by them as equal to direct contact (as if it were less real contact or if it was not contact at all): *"My most effective way of dealing with strong stress is isolation from others. In solitude, I "heal" faster and restore balance. Then I like to go to the network "moja klasa" [my class] and talk with friends. Sometimes I talk with a complete stranger and then I can safely get all the bitterness off my chest, because I know that nobody is going to do any harm to me and I won't be exposed to the risk of rumours and grief (...)"*; *"I isolate myself from the world and people, turn on some quiet music and read a book, or I talk with someone on the phone for hours"*. I would like to point out that among the collected research material (presenting multiple strategies of coping with stress), I chose mainly those responses (see: below), which seem to be particularly interesting and inspiring, and sometimes also surprising and original. With this, I do not try to simply evaluate and interpret them, but only occasionally throw in my own minor insights and comments:

"My most effective way of dealing with strong stress (though not with every kind) is energetic, thorough cleaning, combined with putting in order everything around and getting rid of things I didn't have the courage to throw away before, because I thought they would still come in handy. When I do this, everything's flying around me and generally at the beginning there's an

even bigger mess than before. I throw out everything from the closes, drawers, air the duvet, beat the carpets, clean the fridge, take out heaps of trash, put clothes and other things that are in good condition to give away into big bags (I usually give them away to family in my village, who have five kids, low income, so everything is useful to them). Once I put everything into order and remove any unnecessary things from sight, then I like to observe how the space around me is suddenly expanding. But that's not all. It is necessary to thoroughly clean all possible surfaces (cupboards, desks, floors and others) with a scented mixture that I prepare myself, and which is generally a mixture of scented liquid soap, a bit of bicarbonate soda and a little vinegar solution. After such housecleaning, my whole house smells of freshness, and I'm so tired, that the only thing I can do is to take a hot shower and go to bed. When I stand in the shower and the water runs down me, I get the impression that all my problems and emotions are washed away and I feel relief. Then I make myself something good but light to eat, and I rest (...) This is the most effective way, because it always works for me, although not always in the same way. Besides, I don't always use this method - sometimes, for reasons I can't control, and sometimes because I don't feel like it. Although I know that thanks to the physical exertion that cleaning and putting things in order radically is, I release all the tension and bad emotions accumulated in me. Later, when I look at the clean and fragrant home I feel lighter and happier". Female, 43 years old (statement No. 1)

"(...) I need to cry myself out in solitude, and because I do this best in the shower, I take a hot shower. I turn on Bach, Beethoven or my favourite CD mix very loudly and then turn on a strong stream of water or the rain shower, and cry at will. No one bothers me, nobody can hear or see me then, so I can cry, weep, howl and sob as much as I want (...) After crying like this in the shower I always feel much lighter and better. I usually eat very little then, because nothing can pass my throat, but thanks to this I feel even lighter. This is a proven and effective way, which I have been practicing for many years, so one can even say that this is my anti-stress ritual. I usually do this when my heart feels heavy, when I feel bad, if someone hurts me, when something important to me does not work out, when I myself do something really stupid, unforgivable, irreversible (...). Female, 51 years old (statement No. 2).

"(...) When I'm broken down the presence of my wife helps me a lot. She can listen and advise me, and sometimes simply pull me back to earth, she has a very soothing effect on me (...) It is best, however, when I get some peace and quiet, I lock myself in the garage and make plane models for my son. I love doing this; I even have a few models from my student days. When I'm gluing parts together I don't think about my problems, but focus on the work. I really like surprising my son, hanging another plane model in his room. (...) this is how I get my peace and cut off from the outside world. It is a pity that we don't always have time for it; sometimes I even have to work until the small hours (...). Male, 38 years old - (statement No. 3).

"I have a few favourite ways of dealing with stress. Depending on my mood, I choose what is best for me at the time. Most often, a visit at the hairdresser's or a beautician's does me good, especially when it means a radical change of the whole me - changing my hairstyles or overall look, and better yet, when after such treatments I can afford a new item of clothing. Unfortunately, I can't always afford it, due to finances. Sometimes, I just do a few treatments for myself at home, although this doesn't work quite as well: for example, I take a hot bath filled with water and essential oils of lavender and lemon balm, or with the scent of citrus fruits, I depilate my body, dye my hair, etc. Later, I shut myself in my room, lie down on the bed, and turn on a good melodrama and cry, while using heaps of tissues. It's best when no one bothers me, because I like to be alone. Sometimes, I prefer to meet up with a girlfriend and chat with her,

get everything off my chest (...) Usually I feel better then and have a lighter heart (...)" . Female, 24 years old - (statement No. 4).

"My most effective way of dealing with stress is going to sleep, regardless of the time of day or night. I simply always sleep through a problem. My grandmother always said: "God gives day - God will manage". (...) It always helps me, after sleeping I find it easier to gather my thoughts and sort everything out again". Male, 57 years old - (statement No. 5)

"I usually go to the gym to unload, or I take the dog for a walk and jog with him along the forest, I throw him a stick and he fetches it. I try to eat less and drink a lot of water to have a clear mind. Sometimes, I shut myself in my room, lie down on the couch and turn on rock music really loud, or I surf the Internet (...) I'm calmer then. Male, 34 years old - (statement No. 6)

"It is important to understand what led us into this situation in order to avoid a similar one in the future. That's why I always analyze everything thoroughly and I wonder what I can change so the situation does not repeat itself again. Sometimes, it's enough to change priorities and concentrate only on the most important matters, and resign from those less important. Sometimes, you need to change the way you function and do something differently, or slow down. But you need courage to be able to admit to your own mistakes. At times, it is enough to just rest, to look at your life from perspective. Perhaps we take too much on ourselves and set unrealistic goals, leading ourselves into states of frustration. It is important not to make the same mistakes twice (...) this is an effective way for me". Male, 61 (statement No. 7)

"My method against stress can seem a little bizarre, but it always gives me a positive kick and brings a huge sense of relief. When I feel stressed and bad, I often feel very heavy - physically and mentally, I usually have a huge appetite and devour everything in sight. I just can't stop. What works best for me then is an enema or laxatives, and then a few days of diet – sometimes just a day is enough, I don't eat anything, just drink water and some juice, sometimes yogurt. (...) I feel better then and have much more energy, and I even think better. Unfortunately, I don't always have the perseverance to withstand a diet and then I have to start everything from scratch". Female, 46 years old - (statement No. 8).

"(...) I have to be alone to get a grip of myself. I don't want to see anybody then or talk with anyone. I usually turn on classical music (Mozart and Vivaldi, who I love listening to, are best) and I iron, although generally I hate ironing. I also like to cook for my husband and kids (cooking is my hobby), I choose a recipe and experiment, sometimes I pick something completely new, which I haven't done until now, or I use an old and tested recipe. I like it when the home is filled with delicious smells (...) I don't only change my mood like this, by the whole family's (...)" . Female, 48 years old - (statement No. 9).

"(...) One thing is for sure, when I'm stressed, I can't be alone, but I have to go meet people. When I'm alone, I start to wind myself up, and my problems grow even more and the stress gets much worse. Thanks to people, I find a solution to my problems faster, and sometimes I begin to think about them differently". Male 22 years old - (statement No. 10).

"Prayer helps me a lot, although I'm not a very religious person, and I attend church very rarely. But, thanks to prayer, I become calmer, at peace, I gain a greater distance to everything and my heart becomes much lighter, besides that I feel less lonely. I have the feeling that I'm letting go of all the problems I can't solve myself and which are above me - I leave them to be solved by higher forces (...) I don't feel as lonely then. Once I had a friend, a true friend, who I could talk to and complain, but now she's gone, because she died 3 years ago. Although they say that there no irreplaceable people, nobody can replace Teresa and I miss her greatly. At my age anyway, it is not easy to look for new friends. Besides, I have been disappointed in people many times. Not everyone can be trusted and confided in with problems and secrets. I do have



children, but they already have their own families and own problems, I can't throw in my own (...)" Female, 67 years old (statement No. 11).

"Once, my best remedy for stress was meeting with close girlfriends, friends, who I met with when I was down and with whom I shared all my problems. But the world has changed and now they don't have as much time for each other, they have to take care of their jobs and generally they all live their own lives. Besides, more and more money counts, a good vacation, and less and less another person. So now, when stress hits me, and time allows it, I go for a long walk or go jogging (alone or with my husband) to the local park, or we go to the beach to walk along the shore and breathe in the fresh air and iodine. Sometimes I feel that I need dynamic exercise, other times I feel that I should slow down (...) Generally, when I get a little oxygen and tire myself out I function better, I sleep better and generally feel better". Female, 51 years old - (statement No. 12).

"(...) I have to be among people, where something is happening, and where there is action. It's best when I can go to a game or a dance club, to live it up and release myself from all the stress. It's worse when I drink too much beer, because the next day I feel even more broken. Sex with my girlfriend also helps, but I don't like to talk to her about my problems, because I think it's not very masculine, I just want to be with her (...) Being among other people I forget about my worries and I get some distance to the matter (...)" Male, 24 years old - (statement No. 13).

"The most often meet the guys from our group and we go somewhere, or we stay at one of the flats. (...) In a group it's always fun, we make jokes, tell jokes, sometimes download movies, comedies are the best, because that's when we have the most fun and laugh (...). Male, 23 years old - (statement No. 14).

The cited strategies of the respondents (their own tested methods, ideas) of coping with distressful situations can be an interesting inspiration, as well as impetus for action, searching, choosing, or improving our own ways of dealing with stress. However, they cannot be universalized, or tried to be reduced to the role of reliable recipes (prescriptions) for stress. Behind the presented strategies are real people, therefore "imperfect" people, with their daily problems and stresses. People who share with us their equally "imperfect" experiences, ideas, and even mistakes made. Therefore, it cannot be expected that their strategies will become reliable and suitable strategies for us in every stressful situation. It is worth noting that the research material collected allows us to observe not only a wide range of offered solutions, ideas, but also draws attention to differences among people, who are revealed in the presented strategies (sometimes extremely different strategies) of dealing with strong stress. The statements cited above indicate that a large part of the subjects escapes the toxic effect of stress through strenuous physical exercise, combined with a sense of physical fatigue. For example: *through vigorous cleaning, ironing, running, intense walks, exercise in the gym, going to a dance club, and even through intense crying (sobbing), which is sometimes intentionally invoked (e.g. by watching touching movies - melodramas, which aim to trigger crying)*. It turns out that such crying (recognized here as physical exertion) allows not only to release the built-up tension and emotions, but also constitutes a form of ritual cleansing (*which was reflected, among others, in stories about crying in the shower, see: statement number 2*). This happens because deep, sincere, spontaneous (freed from our control) crying allows us to unload tensions and sadness. Therefore, after crying, a person feels better and light-hearted, at the same time, his(her) organs function much better (compare: footnote 6). It also appears that almost any intense physical exertion brings man healthy and life-giving energy, which although results in physical fatigue, brings relaxation and solace to the soul and emotions. This happens, among others, due to the intensive secretion of endorphins, which help in the release and discharge of stress: (*"when I get*

*a little oxygen and tire myself out I function better, I sleep better and generally feel better", "this way I release all the tension and bad emotions accumulated in me, I'm calmer later", "I feel lighter and happier", "after crying like this in the shower I always feel much lighter and better".* However, there is also a group of such persons, who deal with their own stress in a completely opposite way. Because they are most effective in getting rid of it when they slow their lives down: (*"At times, it is enough to just rest, to look at your life from perspective", "prayer helps me a lot (...) thanks to prayer, I become calmer, at peace, I gain a greater distance to everything and my heart becomes much lighter"; "sometimes I feel that I should slow down", "I take a long, hot bath and by reading magazines I calm down", "I lay on the couch and listen to relaxing music"*). Some subjects emphasize that they are most effective in getting rid of stress when they are alone, in the quiet, in isolation from others, when they shut themselves in four walls only with themselves: (*"I need to be alone to come to grips with myself. I don't want to see anybody or talk to anyone", "I need to cry myself out in solitude", "I shut myself in four walls with a good book, music and I rest"; etc*). A large number of the respondents, however, chooses the company of others and strives for mutual closeness: (*"I must be among people, where something is happening, and where there is action", "when I'm broken my wife's presence helps me a lot", "when I'm stressed, I can't be alone, I have to meet with people"*) Sometimes, in the presented statements, a huge longing for people and for their company can be observed: (*"the world has changed and now they don't have as much time for each other, they have to take care of their jobs and generally they all live their own lives. Besides, more and more money counts, a good vacation, and less and less another person"; "Once I had a friend, a true friend, who I could talk to and complain, but now she's gone, because she died 3 years ago. Although they say that there no irreplaceable people, nobody can replace Teresa and I miss her greatly"*). The analysis of the research material collected allows me to note that the strategies presented by the subjects often constitute a kind of ritual for them, with which they deal with stress, which can be illustrated by: (*the symbolic act of cleaning (purifying) the home, combined with activities of closing nature, such as: ritual washing of surfaces in the home, then washing one's own body in the shower, where the "cleansing" streams of water are to finally free the woman (wash off of her) from any problems, tensions, and bring her expected relief - (see: statement No. 1). Similarly, the earlier mentioned ritual of artificially (and deliberately) provoked crying in the shower, drowned out by loud music of Bach or Beethoven, which was called her "anti-stress ritual" by the Author herself (see: statement No. 2). A similar role is played by the ritual of changing a woman's image (by applying certain beauty treatments and a radical change in hairstyle), which in combination with the crying ritual (artificially triggered by a specifically chosen movie (melodrama)), causes here to feel "more light-hearted", thus releasing her from stress, (see: statement No. 4). A number of cited statements of respondents shows that work, various activities or hobbies, like music, cooking or making plane models (see statements No. 3 and 9) also brings positive results in the fight against the negative effects of stress, which are often helpful and useful not only for those concerned, but also for the people close to them, who are shown concern and care for mutual relations: "I really like surprising my son, hanging another plane model in his room", " I also like to cook for my husband and kids (cooking is my hobby)(...) I don't only change my mood like this, but the whole family's". It also turns out that helpful in fighting against stress are also: prayer (see statement No. 9), which in this case not only calms down the Author of the statements and gives her greater distance to herself, but also reduces the feeling of loneliness; another way of dealing with stress is going to sleep, simply "sleeping through" a problem, which is illustrated by statement No. 5. Some people make the effort to deal with the cause that invokes stress and confront the problem directly, by analyzing the situation that caused the stress, as the Author of*

statement No. 7 does, who always tries to understand the reasons behind the situation in order to avoid similar situations in the future. In his opinion: we must have the courage to confront the problems, in addition, "it is important not to make the same mistakes twice". The same Author also raises the problem of overgrown expectations, which sometimes become the cause of people's problems: "perhaps we take too much on ourselves and set unrealistic goals, leading ourselves into states of frustration". The analysis of the research material collected allows to note that the Authors of a number of cited statements, (which is best illustrated by the last quoted example) do not stop at presenting their own strategies, but also undertake to analyze their own actions (choices). This demonstrates a high level of self-awareness, which plays a considerable role in the process of selfanalysis (which is an integral part of this research process), through which the subjects may not only analyze their own behaviour, reactions, and experiences much better, but on their basis, also construct - in a cognitive way - their own life story. At the same time, it is worth noting that some of the presented strategies may raise some concerns and doubts, especially when associated with risky activities. For example, when the release of stress is connected with excessive alcohol consumption, as shown in *statement No. 13*: "It's worse when I drink too much beer, because the next day I feel even more broken" or when it is suspected that the practiced strategy can have an illness behind it, which is illustrated in *statement No. 8*, where it is highly likely that its Author suffers from bulimia (due to the observation of quite typical symptoms of bulimia, like: compulsive and uncontrolled eating, combined with the activity of disposing of the excessive amounts of food consumed - in this case, using enemas or laxatives. It is commonly known that stress affects the appetite and changes it (which is also confirmed by findings of the research); very often it invokes in the human being hyperphagia, (intensive, excessive) appetite, or leads to a decrease in appetite, which in turn fosters susceptibility to various diseases. This seems all the more important, because due to stress, the human body loses its homeostatic balance, and with it the optimal level of all types of physiological indicators (the body loses: the optimal level of oxygen saturation, the optimum temperature, and the optimal degree of acidity, etc.), compare: Sampolsky R.M, (2011). It is worth noting that such an imbalance in the body generally resulting in the additional imbalance of a person's overall health, his(her) frame of mind, well-being, which may in turn lead to disturbed (imbalanced) reactions and behaviours, which can be observed in some of the strategies presented above. In *justification number 1* (relating to *point 1, 3 and 4 in the questionnaire*) three tendencies are clearly illustrated, which respondents draw particular attention to. It can be observed that respondents attempt to justify (additionally specify) who or what is responsible for the occurrence of strong stress in a person, resulting from his(her) specific ways of responding (emotions, physical reactions, thoughts, behaviours). Therefore, the reactions that occur respondents tend to see as a kind of response to the situation (sometimes they attempt to justify a particular type of reaction), which is reflected in a number of statements: "my reaction would be very different if it hadn't come to this conflict, if I had a few days to complete the project"; "I didn't get enough sleep and I was very tired, that's why I behaved in this way, I kept dropping everything, so it's no wonder I messed things up"; "during the last week, my boss let off steam at us, a few people got a reprimand, I was afraid that I might also become a victim of his frustration. That's why I felt very sad and depressed, and why I didn't want to talk or meet with anyone. I wanted to shut myself away and not see anybody. My frustration surpassed its limit when my husband told me off for bringing work home. I couldn't stand it any longer and I burst, making a huge scene. After all, I was only trying to avoid my boss' anger". In their justifications, respondents most often try to explain their reaction: *by the situation* in which found themselves (usually a specific one), and which released "negative"

emotions and behaviours: *"Recently I was under a lot of pressure, I had to complete an important project, and the kids kept wanting something from me and interrupting my work, no wonder I burst(...)"* At the same time, we can see that respondents *quite often blame others and shift responsibility for their own feelings and actions*. In the next position, statements occur which show that *sometimes respondents seek blame (the causes of a specific response) in themselves*, which is reflected in the following statements: *"(...) By nature, I am rapt and quickly give in to emotions, I usually act faster than I think, which causes many problems and enemies. While people prefer balanced people, and avoid those like me (...) that's why I don't have too many friends. I know that I have to work on myself (...)"*; *"(...) I often explode, get angry, shout, cry, destroy myself, as well as everything and everyone around me. That's why I am alone. No man will cope with this. If you don't change, I will be alone for the rest of my life (...)"* *"I can't control my own emotions very well, which causes me a lot of problems, especially since I don't know how to hold back - what I have in my heart, I have on my tongue. Because of this people know me inside out and sometimes use me. Especially when emotional, I often say things that others should not know about (...)"*; *"I'm a sad type with a very pessimistic nature. Therefore, I feel stressed quite often; you can even say that I live in permanent stress. My husband jokingly says that I'm a specialist of worrying, and when he wants to tease me, he says that I'm stressed because I want to be, because I like being sad and worried, which stresses me out even more. Well, I guess there is some truth to it (...)"*. Note that the majority of respondents were unable to justify the statements concerning point 2 in the questionnaire, where one would need to determine the causes of one's physical sensations, signals sent by one's own body when under severe stress. It should be emphasized that in the questionnaire respondents could easily cite and describe their physical sensations, (sometimes they did so in great detail and extensively), which allows to believe that they are aware of them. It turns out that awareness of one's own physical sensations (signals from the body), do not always go hand in hand with the awareness of their cause, which is illustrated by the justifications to point No. 2 in the questionnaire, and strictly speaking the lack thereof (in the vast majority of cases). Therefore, the respondents' justifications were usually skipped or very brief. Sometimes, they admitted that they do not know much about it. Only a few attempted to justify the merits of their physical sensations, the signals observed in their bodies, by referring to their knowledge in the scope of physiology, biochemistry, or psychology. While this knowledge was generally superficial and was often colloquial knowledge, such as: *"when I'm under severe stress, all the hormones usually boil in me"*; *"when I'm under strong stress, my stomach produces much more stomach acids, which cause severe cramps and stomach pain"*; *"when I'm stressed, I go all tense, which causes my muscles to tighten and then my back and neck hurt"*, *"when I get stressed, my whole body clenches, I'm cold and I have the feeling that my blood circulation slows down"*. Another justification, number 2, refers to point No. 5 in the questionnaire, in which respondents describe their communication with others, while under the strong effects of stress. The collected statements testify to the fact that respondents are usually aware of the impact of their own behaviours (including negative, inappropriate, improper behaviour) on mutual communication with other people. Respondents see that their mood and behaviours accompanying it have a significant impact on the quality of communication, and also trigger specific reactions in the communication of their partners,<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> at this point, it is worth noting the complexity of the process of mutual communication and its interactive nature, which does not allow to treat it solely as an action, restricting it to passing on certain information (for example, our thoughts). As the reaction of our recipient is part of communication, which demands one to focus not only of one's own message, but also on feedback, occurring during mutual interaction, compare: Stewart J, (2000), pp. 46-47.

which finds its justification in the mechanism of reflection and transfer of a mood, which I write about earlier, in reference to Paul Ekman, see: p. 6. At the same time, subjects quite often call upon their own responsibility and emphasize their own contribution and blame in negative mutual communication. *In the following statements (justifications)*, relating to *point 6 in the questionnaire*, in which respondents explain their actions as protection of mutual communication against the adverse effects of stress, various manifestations of their dissatisfaction with their own actions can be observed. They emphasize that their thinking and actions under stress become: *disturbed, illogical, inefficient, inadequate, irrational, etc.* This is also confirmed by previously cited statements in the questionnaire (compare interpretations to point 4 and 5), which shows that the behaviour of the subjects (under the influence of strong stress) are usually strongly dominated by reactions of a defensive nature, which means that they are based on attack or escape. Consequently, this causes that even if a respondent has good intentions and makes an effort to remedy further escalation of tension, in practice, actions based on defensive and offensive strategies are not effective and do not give them satisfaction, which is reflected in the following statements: "In the questionnaire I wrote that I usually cut off further conversation when I'm under stress (...) I do so, because I am afraid of the consequences. Under stress it is easy to blurt out something foolish, do something you later cannot reverse, so it's better to withdraw (...) However, sometimes people don't take this kind of behaviour well, they think that I don't want to talk with them, or that I'm arrogant and conceited. Although it's not true (...)" ; "As I wrote, I'm not able to do much when I'm under stress, because then I become irritated, nervous (I'm a fiery person), which does not really have a positive effect on communication (...) However, I intend to do something about it, I know I have to work on myself a bit (...)". Collected research material and statements mentioned above clearly indicate that stress determines behaviors and reactions of people in a significant way, and it influences the general shape of intercommunication and changes its image and quality as well.

## Summary

The analysis of cited statements of respondents allows to note that stress has a significant influence on the image and quality of interpersonal communication, and it clearly determines reactions and behaviors of people who are subjected to stress during intercommunication. It is worth mentioning that people's reactions behaviours and feelings in distressful situations are not only determined by stimuli directly causing stress. The impact of the cultural habitus is equally important, which very often regulates such responses (behaviours), limits them, or even "imposes" certain (considered to be appropriate or inappropriate in a given culture) ways of handling stress and coping with its negative effects. Many respondents stressed that their method of responding, behaviours under stress, depend largely on a specific context, in which a given reaction (behaviour occurs - which means that such reactions are also dependent on: the specific location, the specific person or persons, or a strictly specified situation, where they take place, etc). However, this specific context, as a rule, is determined by a broader context, first and foremost, the widely understood cultural context, which makes people put greater or smaller effort in order to react or behave "properly" for a given cultural habitus. Therefore, the reactions and behaviour of the subjects often turn out to be different in different situations and various contexts that accompany them. They are different in public places, at work or at one's own home, different among strangers or less known, or in the presence of superiors, and still different among people who we know well, loved ones, for example, friends, family members, or in the presence of a life partner. At the same time, respondents in a number of the statements provided,

show that they are usually able to control and manage their reactions, as well as that they are aware of them. Only a few subjects admit that they do not cope adequately with this, therefore, sometimes they react inadequately in stressful situations, exposing themselves or others and mutual communication, to smaller or larger undesirable consequences. Additionally, the size of these consequences depends largely on expectations and cultural determinants specific for a given culture, which strongly determine (regulate and manage) human reactions and behaviour. Maybe because the subjects more frequently allow themselves for unrestrained and negatively assessed reactions, behaviours towards their loved ones (household members, family), where they know that there will not be any particularly severe or unpleasant consequences, because, as they themselves notice: *"loved ones are usually more tolerant and understanding", "in their company we feel safe"*, therefore, *"we don't need to pretend and we can be ourselves."* At the same time, it is worth noting that such *"being yourself"* is sometimes associated with suffering, hurting *"loved ones"* (sometimes those closest to us), despite the fact that it is they who generally give them the greatest support and sense of security. The presented statements of respondents show that in situations when their negative, undesirable reactions and behaviours can result in severe consequences, then generally they try to *"hold their emotions and reactions in check"*. Due to this, when they are in contact with other people, referred to by them as *"important" or "unfamiliar"*, (bosses, superiors, colleagues, public persons), they make a much greater effort and try to refrain from socially unwanted reactions and behaviours. This does not mean, however, that concern about keeping proper contacts with persons referred to as: *"unfamiliar", "important"*, really means that they are more important for the respondents and deserve more attention and effort than those from closer circles: family, friends (this would be a very simplified conclusion). Such behaviour is associated more with their ability to anticipate the potential consequences and losses that may entail from adverse reactions and behaviours (for example, leading to job loss, exposure to someone, etc.), therefore, people in such relations become very careful, than in contacts with loved ones, who give them much greater freedom in venting their bad mood.

Respondents often point out that effective coping in stressful situations (see: statements to point No. 7 of the questionnaire), requires them to also take into account a number of factors that work effectively only together, not in isolation from others (which means that we must pay attention to: cultural habitus, expectations of others, or personal conditions and habits, which we must sometimes fight with, etc.). This is due to the fact that in order to effectively cope with stress it is necessary to develop in man specific competences that allow him not only to deal much better with the expression of accumulated tension, but also allow him to respond (behave) much more adequately in certain stressful situations, which modern man is undoubtedly more and more vulnerable to.

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