

The Effects of Perceived Control over Distress on Health



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Research Question

- How does perceived control over stress affect our health?
- Importance
 - To help others better understand factors that can contribute to negative effects of health.



Past Research

- There are many factors that affect how we manage stress.
 - Perceived control
 - Type of stressor
 - Daily hassle or major life event



Perceived Control

- Having a sense of control over what was happening during a time of stress helped to assuage negative effects.
- Participants who reported a higher sense of control also showed better adjustment after trauma.
- Some have found that the effect of perceived control over stressor has little effect.



Hypotheses

- Low-control stressors will have a greater negative affect on health.
- High-control stressors will have less of a negative affect on health.



Survey

- Recalled a daily hassle and a major life event
- Physiological symptoms of stress
- Demographic information



Method

■ Participants

- 241 (male = 89, female = 152) college undergraduates. Eighty-five percent were Caucasian.



Method

■ Procedure

- Participants were asked to recall a recent daily hassle that caused stress and a recent major life event that caused them stress.
- After each prompt, participants completed questions about perceived control of the event and physiological symptoms associated with the event.

Results

Table 1

Differences displayed between participants' answers to different stressor types and their mean and standard deviations.

		Mean	SD	t
How important would the event be?	Daily Hassle	3.05	1.21	-4.38***
	Major Life Event	3.45	1.06	
How much control would you feel you have over the event?	Daily Hassle	2.24	1.46	5.12***
	Major Life Event	1.53	1.54	
How expected would the event be?	Daily Hassle	2.67	1.39	5.36***
	Major Life Event	1.92	1.56	
How effectively would you cope with the event?	Daily Hassle	2.30	1.21	1.70
	Major Life Event	2.10	1.35	
How much would you view the event as a loss?	Daily Hassle	2.02	1.43	-3.15**
	Major Life Event	2.41	1.55	
How much would you view the event as a threat?	Daily Hassle	2.19	1.46	-.253
	Major Life Event	2.22	1.60	
How much would you view the event as a challenge?	Daily Hassle	2.60	1.33	3.74***
	Major Life Event	2.13	1.54	

Note: * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$

Results

Table 2

Differences displayed between participants' answers to different stressor types and their mean and standard deviations.

		Mean	SD	t
Cardiovascular	Daily Hassle	8.69	3.73	-2.76**
	Major Life Event	9.38	4.55	
Respiratory	Daily Hassle	13.07	3.26	2.61**
	Major Life Event	12.50	3.89	
Gastrointestinal	Daily Hassle	12.25	3.43	.348
	Major Life Event	12.18	3.89	
Muscular	Daily Hassle	10.41	3.59	-2.88**
	Major Life Event	11.03	4.03	
Skin	Daily Hassle	10.63	3.63	-3.93***
	Major Life Event	11.48	4.06	
Immunity	Daily Hassle	12.94	2.78	1.21
	Major Life Event	12.71	3.49	
Metabolic	Daily Hassle	8.97	4.015	-3.07**
	Major Life Event	9.78	4.43	

Note: *p<.05, **p<.01, ***p<.001



Discussion

- Daily hassles
 - Perceived as less important
 - Perceived more control
 - More expected
 - More of a challenge
 - Perceived as less of a loss
- Health
 - Less cardiovascular, muscular, skin, and metabolic symptoms.
 - More respiratory symptoms.
- Major life events
 - Perceived as more important
 - Perceived less control
 - Less expected
 - Perceived as more of a loss
- Health
 - More cardiovascular, muscular, skin, and metabolic symptoms.
 - Less respiratory symptoms.



Discussion

- It appears that perception of control and severity of the stressor do in fact impact health outcomes.
- The differences found in this study can help researchers and clinicians understand how types of stressors, daily hassles and major life events, and perceived control over those stressors affect health.