**UNIVERSITY OF NAIROBI**

**SCHOOL OF MEDICINE**

**DEPARTMENT OF PSYCHIATRY**

**Monday 15th March, 2010 Dr. Maathai**

**LIFE EVENTS AND ABNORMAL BEHAVIOR**

**Introduction**

* The life span of human beings is characterized by milestones also referred to as life events
* Events that have a major impact on individuals are called major life events
* Life events are external environmental influences that have an impact on human beings
* Life events may be experienced as negative (divorce) or positive (marriage)
* Life events can function as stressors
* When many life events occur in a short period of time, the level of stress can rise to impact on both physical and mental health
* Poorly adjusted individuals are more likely to succumb to mental disorders after a major life events

**Some major life events**

* Entry into school
* Birth of a sibling
* Exams
* Moving houses or migration
* Adolescent crisis
* Initiation in traditional society
* Adolescent pregnancy
* Divorce, separation of death
* Marriage
* Birth of a child
* Change or loss of a job
* Homelessness
* Seperation, divorce etc

**Abnormal Reaction to major life events**

* May range from mild deviation from the norm like mild disturbance like sleep disturbance to major disturbance like psychosis
* May provoke the onset of a psychiatric disorder or the relapse or deterioration of a previously diagnosed disorder
* Psychiatric illness can also cause life events for example a schizophrenic breakdown may lead to the loss of a job

**Early life events; separation and loss**

* Include separation from mother/mothering person for reasons like illness and admission to hospital of either child or mother
* The birth of a sibling may be perceived as loss of previous position as mother’s baby; sibling rivalry
* School start
* Moving house or migration; loss of familiar environment and friends
* Impact on child depends on level of development and prior attachment
* Poorly attached children have more problems with separation
* Symptoms may range from regression, depressive symptoms, withdrawal symptoms, aggression, conduct disorders in older children, school refusal

**Life events and adolescent**

* The normal stressful changes in adolescence makes adolescents particularly vulnerable to negative life events; school change and boarding school, separation/abandonment, bereavement, rejection by contemporaries and failure at school, loss of health
* Other events may also be experienced as negative and stressful
* Biological or physical changes like onset of menstruation, rapid physical changes
* Initiation of sex
* Premature pregnancy and abortion

**Reactions to life events during adolescence**

* Include; depression, anxiety, avoidance
* Conduct disorders manifested in delinquency (crimes of violence)
* Substance use and abuse
* Eating disorders; anorexia nervosa
* Sleep disorders
* The prevalence of suicide and attempted suicide also increases in adolescence

**Exams**

* Panic attack e.g. during KCPE and KCSE; depression, somatisation, psychosomatic disorders

**Childbirth**

* Child birth is often a joyous event for women
* Pregnancy and childbirth can however be associated with biological changes and psychosocial stressors that predispose to psychiatric disorders
* Women who are unable to cope with childbirth for various reasons may suffer maternity blues

**Common stress factors in child birth**

* Birth complications
* Lack of social support
* Young motherhood

**Migration**

* Moving to another country is a major life event
* Moving may result in disruptions, losses, culture shock and isolation which may interfere with the psychological stability of an immigrant
* Refugees and immigrants move to a new country hoping for opportunities and when their goals and aspirations are blocked, mental disorder

**Major illness**

* Any illness that leaves the sufferer with a loss of function and causes a threat on life is a major life event
* Major accidents
* Illness such as cancer
* HIV/AIDS is another major illness

**Menopause and midlife crisis**

* While menopause itself is a normal life span stage; menopause is closely related to other major life events creating the midlife crisis
* Although men don’t have a clear cut biological change as in menopause, a change referred to andropause and a psychosocial crisis ‘midlife crisis’ has been described in men
* Events related midlife crisis include; loss of gainful employment through retirement, loss of own parents, loss of children to the world (empty nest syndrome), diminishing physical attractiveness
* Life change evens have been found to be more important for the development

**Bereavement**

* Death of a family member or death of a loved one is very painful and a source of heightened stress for the bereaved
* Some breakdown and others come through the experience without breaking down
* Determinants of reaction to death
* Sudden death
* Traumatic death
* Strong attachment to a particular person
* Close relationship with the bereaved
* Multiple death in the family

**Abnormal grief reaction**

* Bereavement may provoke any of the psychiatric symptoms particularly anxiety disorders

**Retirement**

* May be experienced as a negative event to the individual because;
* It represents major losses in income and in social status, purpose and role
* It is a period characterized by monotony, boredom and decline
* Retirement may be accompanied by depression and anxiety and even suicide

**Change of jobs, promotion and demotion**

* While these events may be negative or positive as in promotion; some people may not be able to cope with the changes involved or demands
* Stressors include;
* Adjusting to a new job, and new working colleagues
* Climbing up the ladder may come with

**Marriage, separation and divorce**

* While ideally marriage is a positive event, poorly adjusted people may have problems dealing with the changed circumstances or even just the stress of organizing a wedding
* Separation or divorce on the other hand is a negative event that causes stress, trauma and the need for a lot of adjustment for both spouses and their children
* Reactions; depression, anxiety disorders, somatic disorders and substance abuse, conduct disorders

**Major traumatic life events**

* Defined as an event that is experienced as life-threatening or includes a danger of injury so severe that the person is horrified, feels helpless and experiences a psychophysiological alarm response during and shortly after the experience

**Reaction to traumatic life events**

* Any form of psychiatric disorder particularly major depressive and anxiety disorders
* Reaction to trauma may warrant a special diagnosis of acute stress disorder

**IATROGENIC DISORDERS AND ABNORMAL BEHAVIOR**

**Introduction**

* Health workers and health systems are dedicated to promotion of health and health care
* There are instances when they cause diseases, create disabilities or cause the health of those involved to become worse

**Iatrogenic disorders**

* Caused by doctors and other health workers or health care systems
* Are present in all branches of medicine

**Causes of iatrogenic disorders**

* Incorrect or incomplete clinical assessment (physical, behavioral, psychosocial and psychological)
* Inappropriate diagnostic and treatment intervention
* False attribution to the etiology of the problems
* Failing to recognize and reinforcing dysfunction behavior
* Failure to promote function and effective return to work

**Misdiagnosis**

* When mental health workers misdiagnose and start patients on inappropriate treatment
* Patients with convulsion disorders are often misdiagnosed as having epilepsy and treated for years on antiepileptics; sudden withdrawal causinf seizures
* Patients with organic conditions like hyperthyroidism, drug side effects
* Misdiagnosis in medicine of life threatening conditions may create psychiatric conditions
* Misdiagnosis with cancer or HIV/AIDS etc may lead to stress depression

**Medicalization of psychological disorder**

* Invocation of a medical diagnosis to explain physical discomfort that is not caused by disease
* Application of a medical intervention to treat as in;
* Manchausen’s syndrome (in need of surgeries all the time\_
* Anxiety disorders
* Pain disorders
* Body dysmorphic disorders
* Conversion disorders

**Creating dependency to psychotropic drugs**

* Substance abuse and dependency
* Some of the most commonly prescribed and over the counter drugs are sedatives/tranquilisers (benzodiazepines, barbiturates) and pain killers (opiates)
* In many cases the use of drugs is initiated by doctors
* Patients continue using the drugs because of addiction

**Reinforcing deviant behavior**