Occupational Stress

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“Job-related stress has created a crisis that largely goes unrecognized by employers.”

Source: Northwestern National Live Insurance, 1991

Seminar Objectives

Identify How the Structure of Work and Organizational Characteristics Impact worker health.

- Physiologic Responses to Stress
- Psychological Disorders Among Workers

-Behavioral Responses

Seminar Objectives

Identify the Impact of Worker Stress on Organizations

- -Increased Absenteeism
- -Increased Rates of Illness
- -Poor Morale
- -Decreased Productivity

Seminar Objectives

Identify Sources of Job Stress

-Psychological Demand
-Decision Latitude
    -Skill Discretion
    -Autonomy
- Social Support

Seminar Objectives

Discover Strategies for Preventing and Controlling Adverse Effects of Work Related Stress

- Stress Management Programs
- Quick Fix Stress Reducers
- Lifestyle Wellness
- Quick on the Job De-stressors

Stress Response Physiology 101

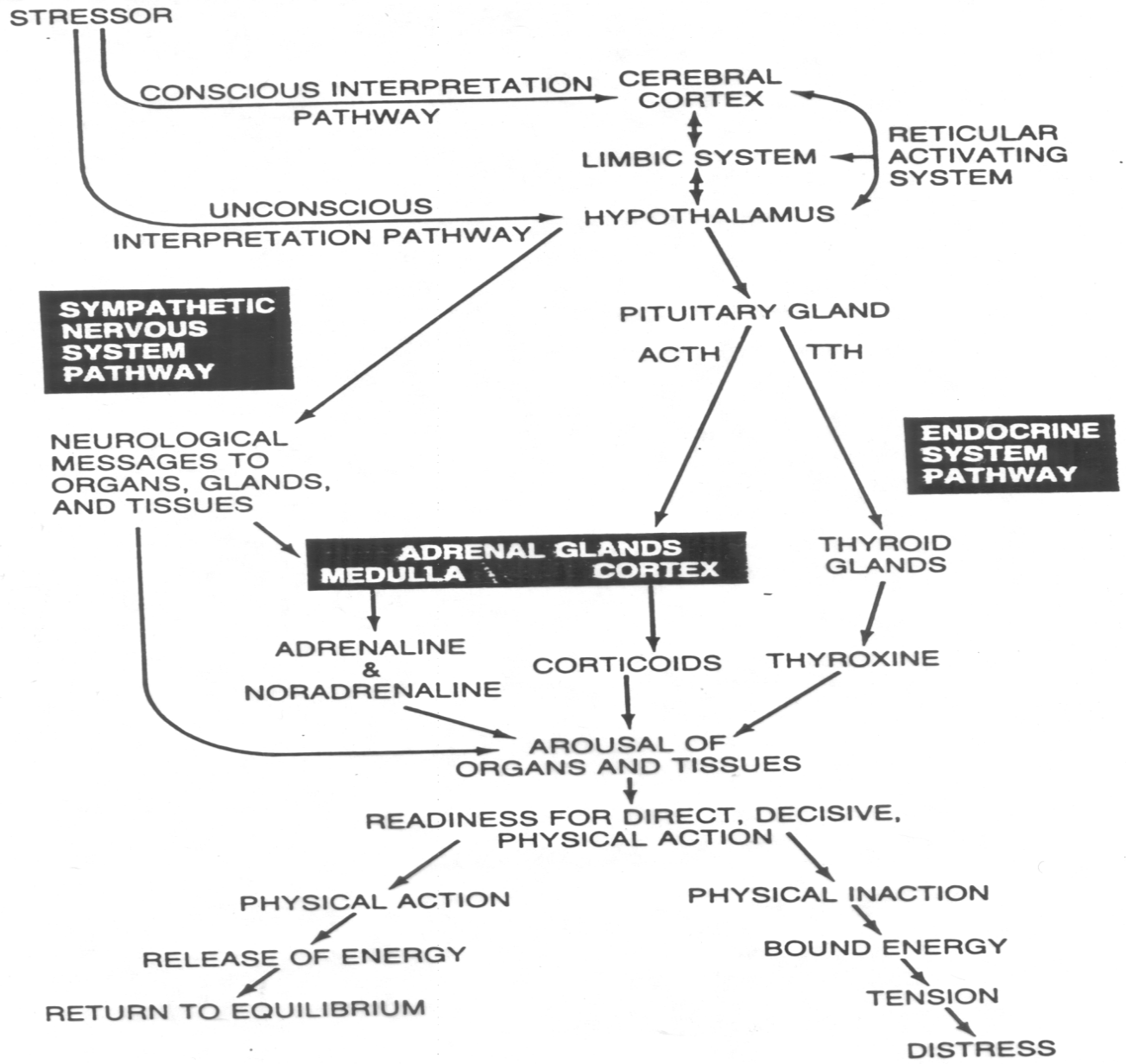
Fight or Flight Response

-Basic (Necessary) to All Animals

-Short Term Arousal is Taxing for the Body but not Toxic

-Long Term Arousal Creates Difficulties with Relaxation and Contribute to Stress Related Disease.

FIGURE 2-4 The Stress Response

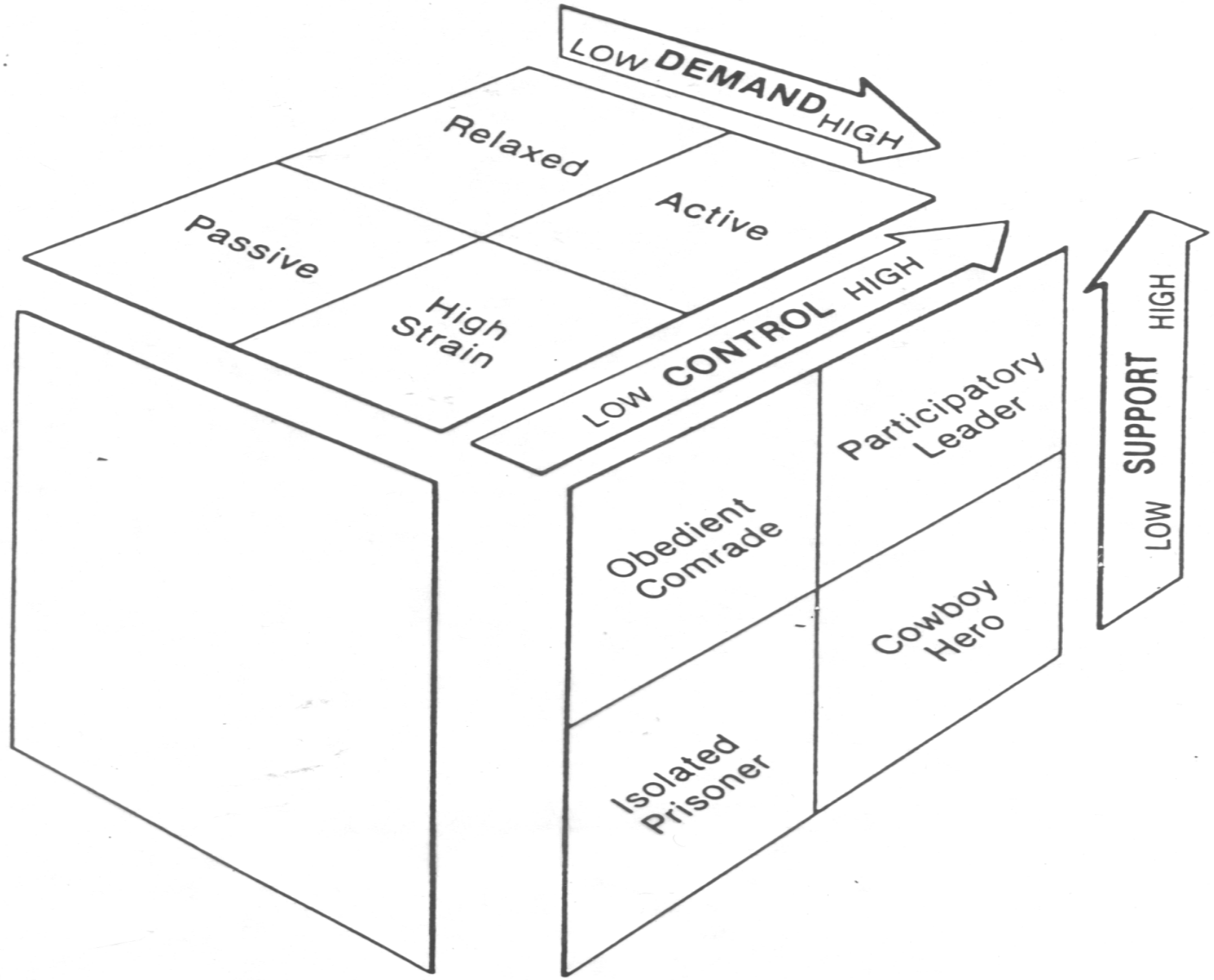


Demand/ Control Model

Worker stress arises from an imbalance between the demands and decision latitude (or control) in the workplace.

FIGURE 2–8

A 3-dimensional model of the psychosocial work environment



Psychological Demands

Best Case Scenario

- Job has Predictable, Routine Demands Mixed with New Learning
- Magnitude of Demands is Mediated by Interpersonal Decision Making Between Parties with Relatively Equal Status.

Decision Latitude: Skill Discretion

Best Case Scenario

- The Job Offers Possibilities to Make the Maximum Use of the Skill and Provides Opportunities to Increase Skills on the Job.
- New Technologies are Created in the Workers Hands, Improving Production Power.

Decision Latitude: Autonomy

Best Case Scenario

- Workers have Influence Over Selection of Work Routines and Work Colleagues and Can Participate in Long Term Planning.
- Interfaces with Machinery or Technology Allows the Worker to Assume Control.

Social Relations

Best Case Scenario

- Social Contacts are Encouraged as a Basis for New Learning and are Augmented by New Telecommunications Technologies.
- New Contacts Multiply the Possibilities for Self-Realization through Collaboration.

Four Types of Work

1. **High Strain Jobs**

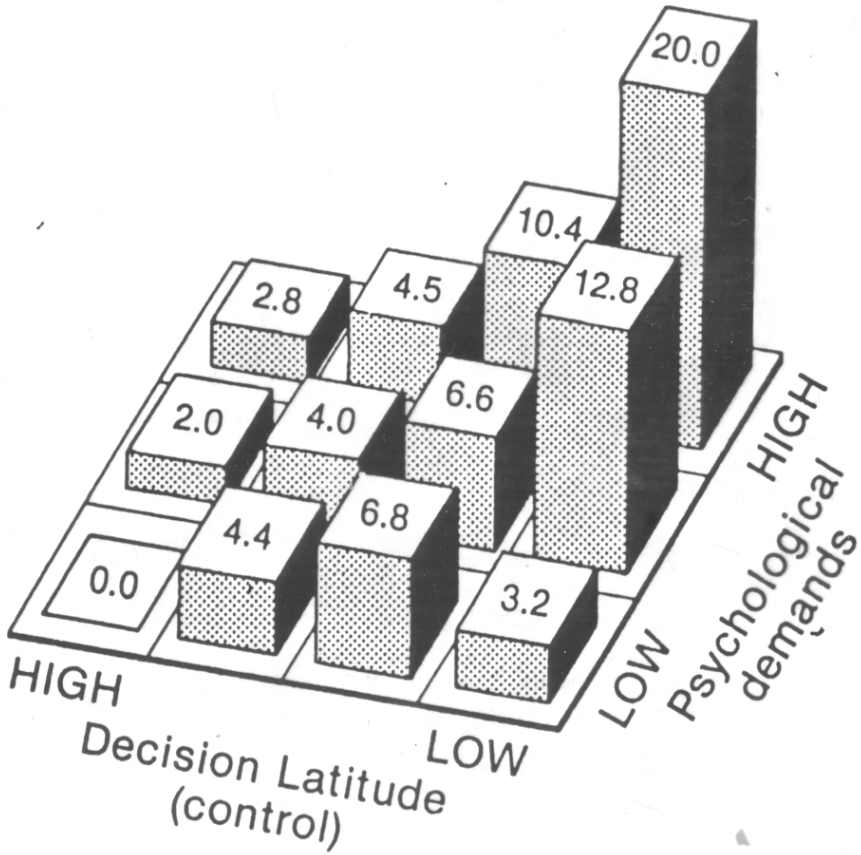
Psychological Demands of the Job are High and the Decision Latitude is Low.

- Result in the Most Severe Adverse Physiological Outcomes
- Highest Risk for Cardiac Disease

FIGURE 1–1

Job characteristics and heart disease prevalence
(Swedish males, 1974, N = 1,621; see p. 123)

Number on vertical bar is percentage in each job category with symptoms.



SOURCE: Redrawn from Karasek et al. 1981. Reprinted by permission of the *American Journal of Public Health.*

Four Types of Work

2. **Active Jobs**

Demands High Levels of Performance but the Workers' Decision Latitude is Also High.

-Highest Level of Learning and Growth

-Most Likely to Enjoy Leisure and Recreation Outside of Work

Four Types of Work

3. **Low Strain Jobs**

The Workers Decision Latitude is High but the Psychological Demands of Work are Low.

(Utopia)

- Low Levels of Psychological and Physical Strain are Anticipated.

- Highest Level of Creativity and Problem-Solving.

Four Types of Work

4. **Passive Jobs**

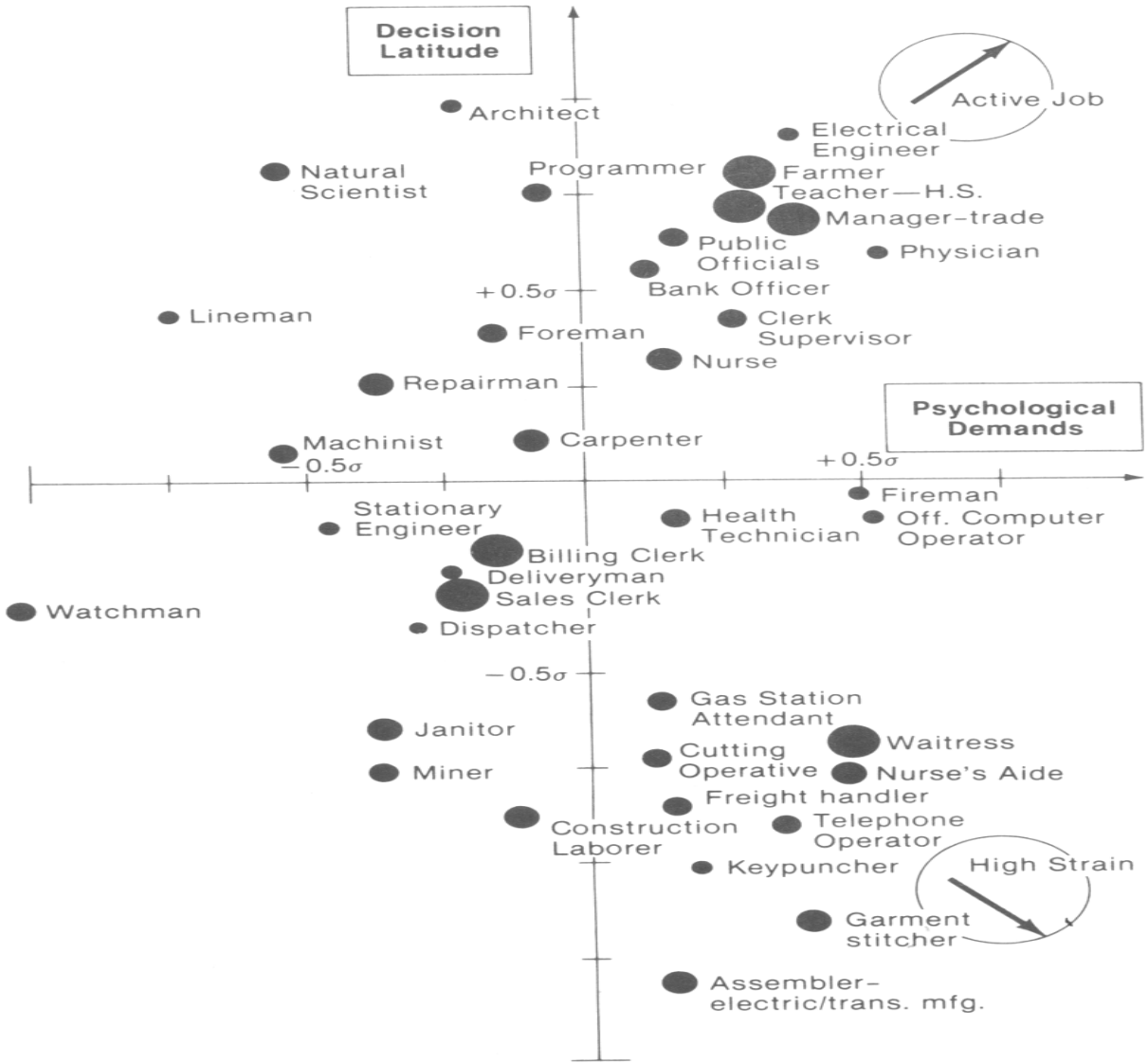
Low Psychological Demand and Low Control for the Worker.

- Gradual Atrophying of Learned Skills Due to Skill Underutilization.

-Average Level of Illness Risk because Fewer Stressors are Confronted.

FIGURE 2–2

The occupational distribution of psychological demands and decision latitude (U.S. males and females, N = 4,495)



SOURCE: Data from Quality of Employment Surveys 1969, 1972, 1977. Figure reprinted from Karasek 1989a; used with permission of Baywood Publishing Co.

The “Toxic” Workplace

Characterized by

-Role Ambiguity
-Role Conflict
-Competition and Rivalry
-Poor Interpersonal Relationships

Changing Workplace - - early in the next millennium

Workers as Generalists - - flexible portfolio of skills, knowledge and abilities, and multitalented; requires continuing education and “re-invention”

Leverage technology “to the max”

Restructuring/reorganizing/reconfiguring - - will continue and even accelerate in corporations worldwide

Changing Workplace - - early in the next millennium (continued)

Demographic trends - - gender composition and age of workforce, early retirement

Increase in Service jobs - - requires “boundary spanning” - - must interact with (“deal with”) boss(es), co-workers, subordinates, irate customers or clients, sales representatives, owners, public

"Do you want me to explain to you just why you're having feelings of inadequacy?"

Impact on Organizations

-Absenteeism

-High Rates of Illness

-Low Productivity and Work Performance

- Low Morale

-Loss of Revenue

Impact on the Worker

Increase risk of Physical Disease

- Cardiovascular Disease
- Hypertension
-Gastrointestinal Disorders
-Musculoskeletal Problems

Model of Job Stress and Health

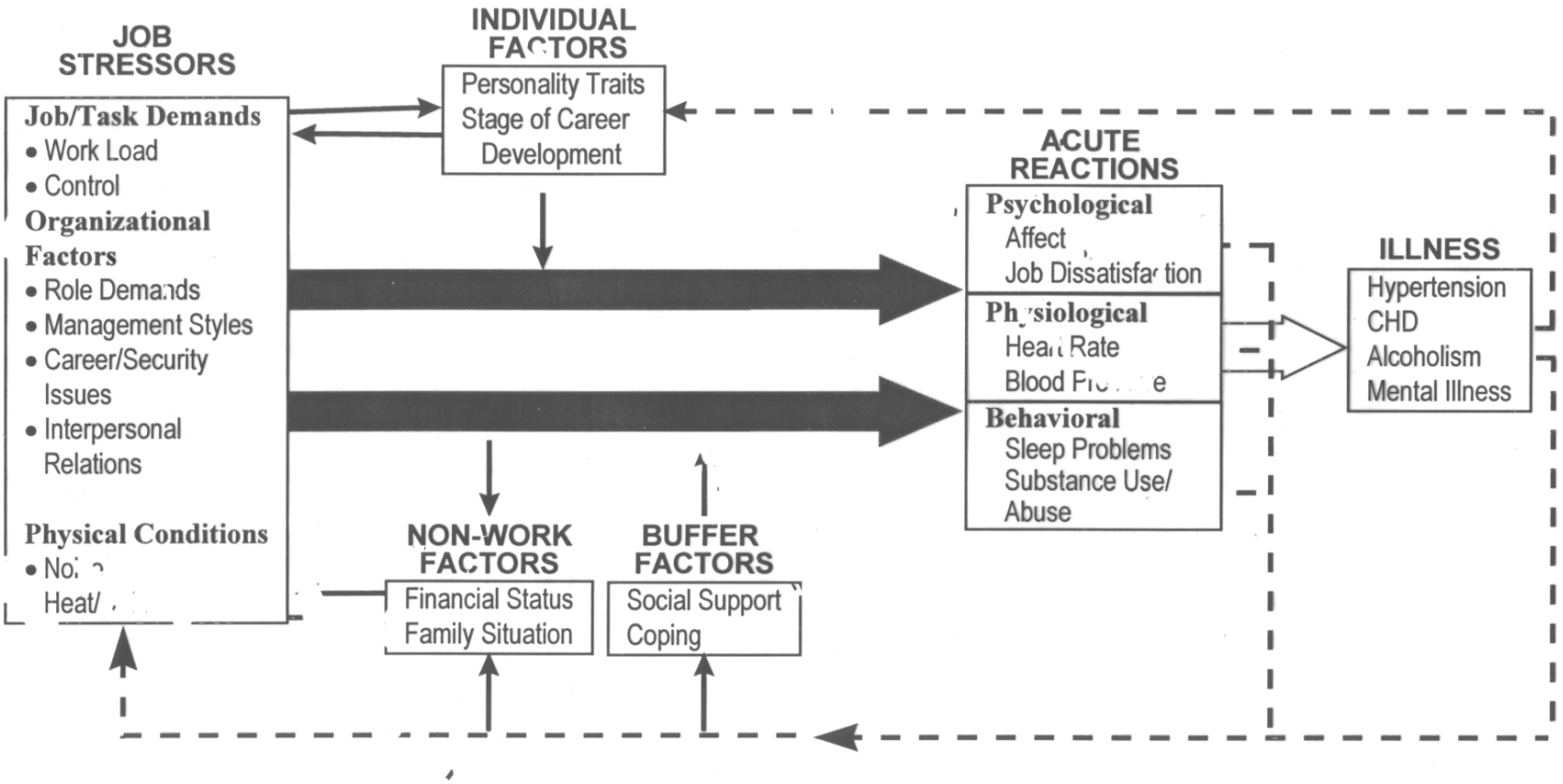


Figure 2.1 Model of Job Stress and Health

Hurrell, J. (1987). An overview of organizational stress and health. In L. Murphy & T. Schoenborn (Eds.), *Stress management in work settings*. US Dept. of Health & Human Services (NIOSH) Publication #87-111, Washington, D.C.

Impact on the Worker

Increase risk of Psychological Disorders

-Anxiety

-Depression

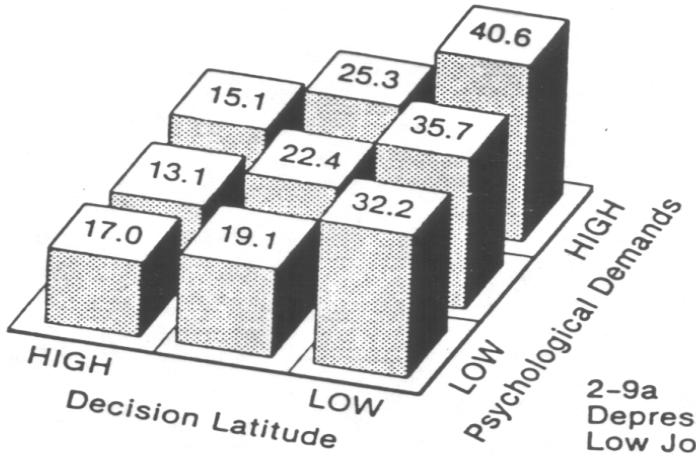
-Burnout

-PTSD Symptoms

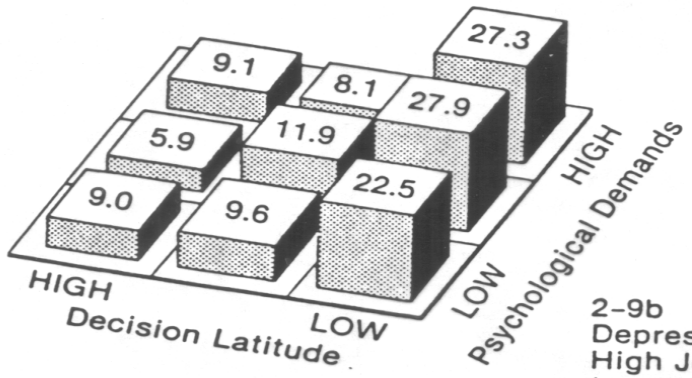
-Conversion Disorders

FIGURE 2–9 (a-b)
Social support, the demand/control model, and depression
(U.S. males and females, N = 2,679)

Number on vertical bar is percentage in each job category with symptoms.



2–9a
Depression at
Low Job Social Support
(population average = 26.8)



2–9b
Depression at
High Job Social Support
(population average = 12.2)

NOTE: For discussion of depression indicator, see p. 49*n*. Cell sizes, reading from left to right, are as follows (see p. 49*n*), for low support—high demands: 126, 158, 244; medium demands: 99, 152, 129; low demands: 53, 120, 121; for high support—high demands: 208, 99, 66; medium demands: 222, 160, 86; low demands: 234, 251, 151.

SOURCE: Data from Quality of Employment Surveys 1972, 1977.

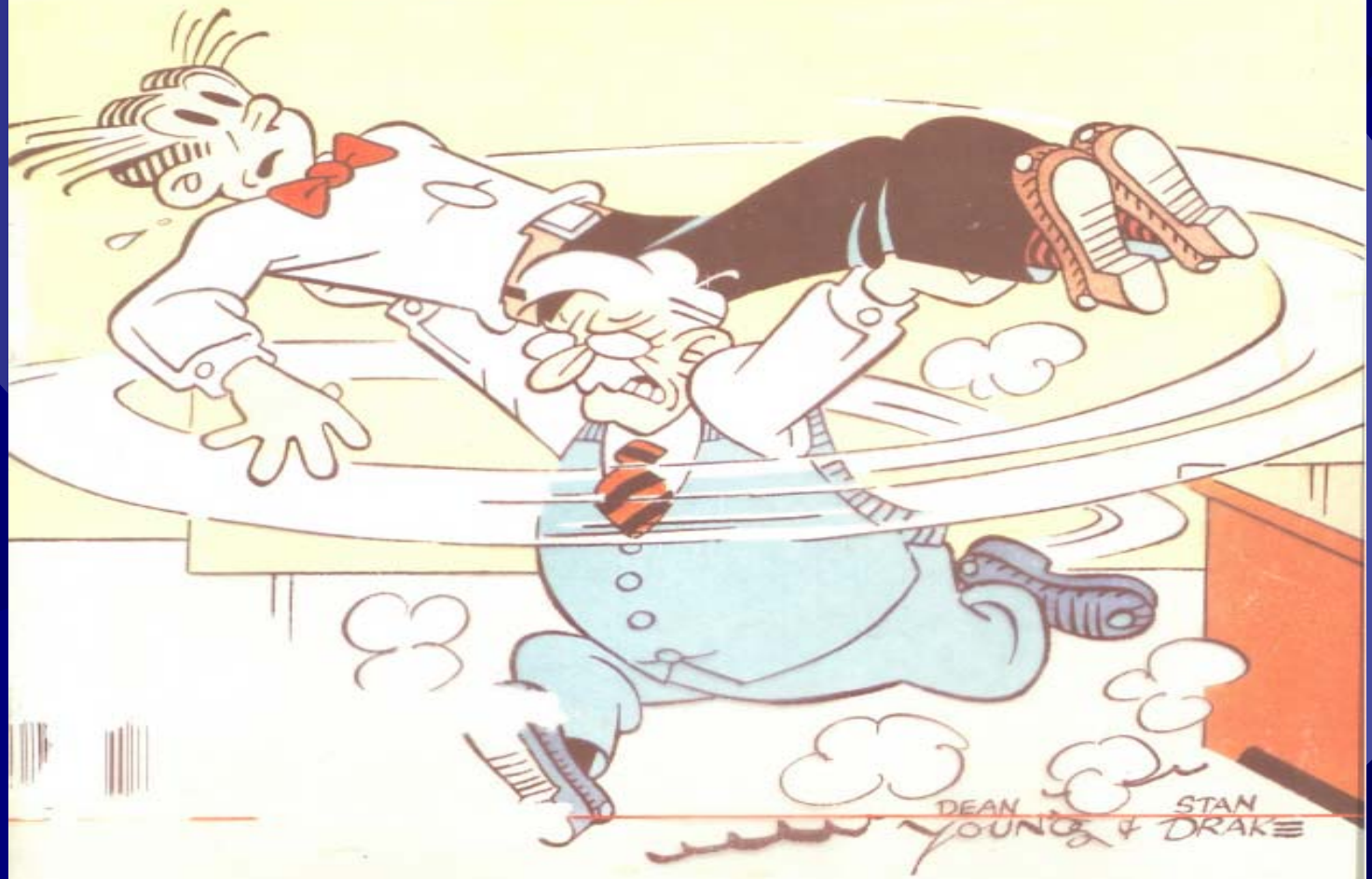
Impact on the Worker

Increase in Negative Behavioral Outcomes

- Absenteeism
-Substance Abuse
-Increased Errors/Accidents
-Decreased Recreation/Social Isolation
- Domestic Discord

Stress on the Job

What You and the Boss Can Do About It



Stress Prevention Strategies

Reducing Individual Vulnerability with Education:

- Assertiveness Training
- Conflict Resolution Skills
- Analysis of the Role of the Environment to Avoid Self Imposed Blame

Stress Prevention Strategies

- Develop a “Sounding Board”
- Meditation/Relaxation Programs
- Increase Recreation to Balance Stressors
- Increase Cardiovascular Activity
-Biofeedback
- Identify Your “Stress Style”

Six Ways of Relating to Stress

(from Schafer, 1987)

1. **Stress Seekers** (**"stress addicts"**) - Thrive on challenge, risk and stimulation.

2. **Stress Avoiders** - Thrive on security and familiarity (may be realistic or based on irrational fear).

3. **Distress Seekers** - Thrive on misery, crisis and martyrdom - usually stems from childhood.

4. **Distress Avoiders** - Thrive on health and contentment and avoid distress.

5. **Distress provokers** - Thrive on creating misery, disharmony and upset for others.

6. **Distress reducers** - These are "natural healers"; promote health, happiness and growth.

Stress Prevention Strategies

Have your Workstation Ergonomically Evaluated

- Take Stretch Breaks Every 20-30 min.

-Maintain 18-30 Inches from your Computer Screen

-Use a Foot Rest to Support Your Feet

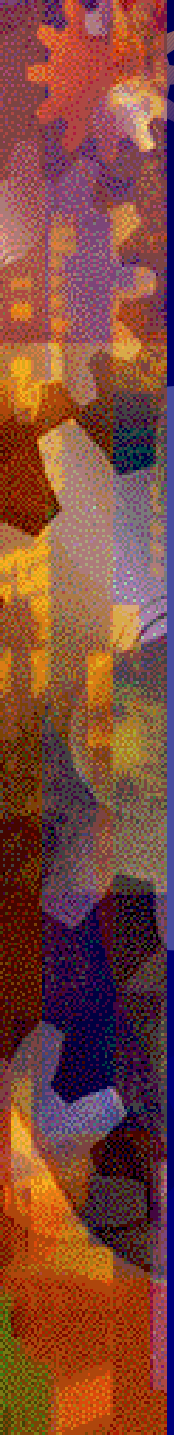
- Keep Your Head and Neck in a Neutral Position

Stress Prevention Strategies

- Inquire About Stress Prevention Programs at Work
- Develop a “Morale Team”
- Have Meetings Standing Up
- Set a “by minute” Agenda for Meetings

"Have you ever considered another line of work?"

References

Karasek, R & Theorell. *Healthy Work Stress, Productivity, and the Reconstruction of Working Life. 1990.*

Levy, B.S & Wegman, D.H. *Occupational Health Recognizing and Preventing Work Related Disease and Injury.* 2000.