Living in Perpetual Crisis: How Do Global Events Shape Our Anxiety and Resilience?

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Abstract

The 21st century is known as the age of crises and constant probing for resilience in the face of human challenges. While our neurobiology has been designed to help us cope with sudden threats like these, continuous exposure through digital media of events unfolding on a monumental scale can engender constant anxiety in anyone familiar with empathic capacity. Using Lazarus's cognitive appraisal theory as a foundation, this article describes how exposure to trauma can lead to psychological distress in the presence of an imbalance between appraised threat and coping resources—oftentimes paralleled by learned helplessness or vicarious traumatization. However, crises can also trigger a resilience response: the literature on post-traumatic growth testifies to multiple adaptive pathways, which are modulated by both cultural and genetic factors. Leading-edge neuroscience research demonstrates that neural plasticity can be harnessed through tools such as mindfulness meditation, controlled breathing, and biofeedback to rewire the stress response system. Lifestyle interventions like 4-7-8 breathing, limited screen time, nature therapy, or exercise are practical and evidence-based approaches to reduce anxiety and build resilience. In times like these, a balanced approach to thinking about crises is not only crucial for mental health but also essential for fostering constructive societal resilience.

Introduction

In the 21st century, humanity faces a myriad of ongoing global crises: pandemics, armed conflict, ecological collapse, and geopolitical instability, to name a few. This state of near-continuous crisis has redefined the scope of psychological adaptation, characterized by a gradual increase in people's feelings about such crises, in addition to this situation. At the same time, the development of the Internet allows people to learn about crises more quickly, including those distant from them. As a result, the human neurobiological system remains evolutionarily calibrated to respond to acute dangers rather than persistent threats. This paper aims to examine how global events shape anxiety and explores strategies for individuals and societies to employ in addressing such anxiety.

How Global Events Cause Anxiety

Global crises can bring negative psychological feelings in different ways. Lazarus proposed in Cognitive Appraisal Theory that emotions are not triggered directly by external events. However, through the dynamic process of cognitive appraisal of the relationship between the event and the individual, he claimed that the individual must cognitively interpret environmental stimuli to trigger emotions. It is emphasized that anxiety arises from an imbalance between primary appraisal and secondary appraisal of threats (Murphy, T Franklin, 2025). For example, in the case of the global climate crisis, when a climate crisis is perceived as an "uncontrollable threat", this can lead to the negative emotion of learned helplessness, even if the climate crisis does not have

the perceived impact on the world from an objective point of view （Lau, Sam S S, et al., 2024).

When confronted with existential fears that are biased towards individuals, such as those found in social media and news reporting (for example, reports on epidemics and wars), it will imperceptibly induce a fight-or-flight response among some people through vicarious trauma. This is mainly because, in order to face possible pressure or danger, the human brain triggers a state of tension and anxiety through the sympathetic nervous system, thereby causing people to experience varying degrees of anxiety. Vicarious trauma also explains the occurrence of this situation, that is, when a person is in a state of sympathy for any traumatic event, under certain conditions, the relevant surviving memories are triggered, thus causing a person to fall into a particular negative emotion that is difficult to let go of.

The Shaping of Individual Resilience by Global Events

While global crises trigger anxiety, they also activate the adaptive reconfiguration of the human nervous system. Resilience here is not a static psychological trait, but rather a dynamic process of neural recalibration in the individual to cope with ongoing stress.

Long-term tracking studies of the Post-Traumatic Growth Trajectory Model have revealed that when faced with persistent global crises such as climatic catastrophes, epidemics, etc., individuals exhibit four types of differentiated adaptation trajectories: approximately 55%-65% of individuals are resilience-dominant, able to maintain psychological homeostasis through emotion regulation strategies; 15%-20% exhibit

recovery-type traits, which progressively improve after experiencing initial distress; 10%-15% fall into a chronic dysfunctional type of persistent psychological distress; and another 5%-8% show a delayed-response type characterized by a lagging trauma response after superficial adaptation (Bonanno, 2004). Notably, cultural neuroplasticity plays a key moderating role in this process: the proportion of delayed-response phenotypes is significantly elevated to 19.5% in East Asian groups, a difference that stems from collectivist culture's normative inhibition of immediate emotional expression. From an evolutionary adaptation perspective, such delayed responses essentially constitute a psychological buffering mechanism against the stress of chronic uncertainty, providing a window of time for adaptive neural restructuring through temporary emotional suppression (Bonanno, 2023).

In addition to cross-cultural differences in psychological adaptation trajectories, the ongoing stress of global crises reshapes the functional architecture of the autonomic nervous system at the physiological level. As mentioned above, individual resilience remains a component of the fight-or-flight response, which is primarily based on the theory of autonomic plasticity. The theory of autonomic plasticity reveals that human physiological systems for coping with stress can be trained and upgraded: through specific exercises (e.g., respiratory biofeedback or mindfulness meditation), individuals can significantly enhance their parasympathetic nervous system's regulatory functions, especially the vagal tone, in a way that is comparable to upgrading a primitive "fight-or-flight response" to a smart security device (Porge, 2007) The core mechanism is to make the primitive "flight response" more

self-protective and accurate. When vagal inhibition is strengthened, the body's response pattern to stressors changes from indiscriminate fear and nervousness (e.g., increased heart rate upon hearing news of a disaster) to a more accurate recognition of real threats.

Easing the Emotional Impact of Global Events

While global events have a substantial psychological impact on people, they also subconsciously reintroduce a deeper level of psychological stress and anxiety due to the dissemination of news and other digital media. However, this does not mean that news and other related social media are useless or should be resisted. What people should really do is to learn how to minimize the adverse mental effects of these global events.

In the face of "fight-or-flight response", people can effectively adopt the "4-7-8 breathing method", that is, first inhale for 4 seconds, then hold your breath for 7 seconds, and finally exhale for 8 seconds, and repeat several times, which can rebuild the efficiency of the "brainstem-limbic system" pathway, and transform the amygdala into a prefrontal dominant cognitive modulation. This method can rebuild the efficiency of the "brainstem-limbic system" pathway and transform the threat response of the amygdala into cognitive regulation led by the prefrontal lobe. This method can help people relax and adjust back to a healthier mental model under the mental state of tension and anxiety.

Similarly, as data media can, to some extent, cause people's brains to make inaccurate crisis judgments, which can lead to unnecessary tension and anxiety, and

intensive social media coverage of wars and disasters is prone to trigger vicarious trauma, which brings bystanders' amygdala activation patterns closer to those who have experienced it firsthand. People can mitigate and prevent it by reducing their exposure to such news. Social media can further improve the actual problem of people's psychological over-anxiety by replacing catastrophic descriptions of events with suggestions for solutions (Lau, Sam S. S., et al., 2024).

In addition to these more targeted methods of relief, generalized methods of self-pleasuring, such as exercising, hiking, and listening to music, can also be used when one is in a low state of self-psychological well-being or when one is experiencing feelings of stress and anxiety. There are many ways to address this issue, not only for the individual but also for all sectors of society, including the government. However, there is only one goal, and that is to ensure a good mental and psychological state.

Conclusion

With the development of the times and the advancement of science and technology, global events can occur between countries, between human beings and the environment, and in many other areas, thus spreading throughout the world. Although these events evoke negative emotions and mental states to a large extent, it is essential to acknowledge that they also contribute to the development and progress of history and society. Living in such a historical context, people today should consider their own relevance to these events and find a balance between themselves and these global events, so that they can be aware of the world without affecting their

individual state. At the same time, in an era where the number of people suffering from mental illnesses is increasing, personal happiness is plummeting, and many kinds of stresses and anxieties are compounding, people should find their own ways of psychological release to ensure that they can face more unknown challenges and opportunities with a good state of mental health.

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