

Review of International Geographical Education | RIGEO | 2020

RIGEO



ISSN: 2146 - 0353

**Review of International
GEOGRAPHICAL EDUCATION**



www.rigeo.org

Easing Depression in Daily Life in Jojo Moyes Me Before You

V. Jasuve Esther¹,

Dr. P. Helmsly Solomon²

¹Research Scholar, Reg No.21123114012033,

Nesamony Memorial Christian College, Marthandam,

Affiliated to Manonmaniam Sundaranar University, Tirunelveli-627012, Tamilnadu, India.

²Research Guide, Assistant Professor, Nesamony Memorial Christian College, Marthandam,

Affiliated to Manonmaniam Sundaranar University, Tirunelveli-627012, Tamilnadu, India.

Abstract

UNICEF describes stress as a universal experience triggered by pressure, overwhelm, or an inability to cope, noting its dual nature: "Small amounts of stress can be beneficial, spurring us to accomplish tasks like passing an exam or delivering a speech. However, excessive stress, particularly when it spirals beyond control, can harm our mood, physical and mental health, and relationships" (1). Stress significantly disrupts life and mental well-being, fostering restlessness and unease. Beyond essentials like food, shelter, clothing, and relationships, the need for relaxation and peace is fundamental across all ages—from children to the elderly—in any society. Jojo Moyes weaves these insights into her narrative, resonating with readers.

The innate human desire for a calm and balanced life is often challenged by societal structures, including workplace dynamics, family settings, and personal obligations. These factors can lead to misunderstandings, stress, and even traumatic symptoms or depression. Solitude alone does not guarantee relief from stress; rather, it is intertwined with various life elements. Similarly, while nutrition is vital, it alone cannot ensure daily vitality or joy—other factors are equally critical for a serene existence. This article explores how Jojo Moyes connects these themes to everyday experiences, drawing from diverse life sources to illustrate how individuals recognize distress and find ways to alleviate tension, pressure, and stress.

Key terms: procrastination, mental well-being, genetics, Self-Care, stress

Stress is a widespread experience, emerging whenever individuals face pressure or tension in their daily routines. Those who encounter stress regularly often navigate demanding work environments where they are deeply committed and highly engaged. Persistent family challenges, health worries, and financial pressures are inescapable aspects of life, contributing significantly to elevated stress levels for nearly everyone. Various influences—such as genetics, social support, coping mechanisms, personality traits, discrimination (stemming from caste, race, creed, culture, customs, gender, or other factors), socioeconomic conditions, childhood trauma, and even one's occupation—can amplify these effects.

Prolonged exposure to the ongoing stress of daily life may lead to poor health or heighten the risk of developing health issues. According to the Mental Health Foundation, stress is described in a similar vein, underscoring its pervasive impact on well-being. Stress is a natural response inherent to all people. The human body is built to encounter and respond to stress. When faced with changes or difficulties (known as stressors), your body triggers both physical and psychological reactions. This is what we call stress (2).

Stress can contribute to physical ailments like heart conditions, numbness, or nerve-related breakdowns, as well as psychological and mental health challenges such as anxiety disorders and depression. The impact differs from one individual to another, influenced by the environment they inhabit. When someone is affected by psychological or mental difficulties, proper guidance is essential for treatment, though various remedies are also recommended to help the distressed individual regain normalcy and find renewed purpose in life. In Jojo Moyes' *Me Before You*, when Will is grappling with depression, Louisa responds during a conversation, saying, "No, I want him to live. But— But I want him to live only if he chooses to" (392). Her words are not meant to encourage suicide; rather, they reflect an outburst born of her own stress and emotional turmoil.

Stress or depression, as mental health challenges, may stem from traumatic experiences in a person's life. Numerous strategies have been recognized to alleviate the burden of persistent mental stress. Engaging in regular physical activity, for instance, can be soothing, helping to lower stress levels and enhance mood. This is supported by Jillian Kubala's findings in a 2023 Healthline review, which highlighted a 6-week study involving 185 university students. The study showed that participating in aerobic exercise twice a week markedly decreased overall perceived stress, particularly stress tied to uncertainty, while also notably improving self-reported depression symptoms.

The food consumed by individuals who have experienced trauma influences all facets of their mental well-being, according to a July 2022 review from the National Institutes of Health.

Individuals who consume diets rich in ultra-processed foods and added sugars are more prone to elevated levels of perceived stress, as noted in a July 2022 review by the National Institutes of Health. Persistent stress can drive a tendency to overeat and seek out highly appealing foods, potentially undermining both overall health and emotional well-being (3).

A diet lacking in nutrient-rich foods can heighten the risk of deficiencies in key nutrients, like magnesium and B vitamins, which play a vital role in managing stress and stabilizing mood. Reducing consumption of heavily processed foods and drinks can help ensure the body receives adequate nourishment. Enhancing resilience to stress can be supported by incorporating options such as vegetables, fruits, beans, fish, nuts, seeds, and similar foods into one's diet.

Constant reliance on smartphones, computers, and tablets can elevate stress levels unless balanced with adequate rest, hydration, and regular physical activity. The study referenced earlier indicates that overuse of smartphones is linked to heightened stress and mental health issues. In her

novel *Me Before You*, Jojo Moyes illustrates how Will's mother deeply cares for him, yet his unexplained rejection of her love reflects a form of depression woven into the story as,

I wanted to quietly convey to him that life is full of shifts—things might evolve, flourish, or falter—but it always continues forward. We're all woven into a vast cycle, a design so intricate that perhaps only God could fully grasp its meaning. Naturally, I couldn't voice this to him—Will and I have never been ones for deep conversation—but I longed to demonstrate it. It was like an unspoken vow, a way to hint at the grander scheme of things and the possibility of a more hopeful tomorrow (184).

Will's words reveal his lack of concern for his own life and his disinterest in embracing a future with hope. Spending excessive time on screens is linked to diminished psychological well-being, driving up stress levels in both adults and children. This habit often disrupts sleep, further heightening stress and posing additional risks. On the other hand, engaging in self-care practices is known to lower stress. Experts and those with experience suggest various strategies, such as taking a walk outdoors, enjoying a bath, lighting candles, reading an enjoyable book, exercising, cooking a nutritious meal, stretching before bedtime, getting a massage, pursuing a hobby, using a diffuser with soothing scents, or practicing yoga or breathing exercises.

Individuals who prioritize self-care generally experience reduced stress and an enhanced quality of life, whereas neglecting self-care is linked to an increased likelihood of stress and burnout. Setting aside time for oneself is crucial for maintaining a healthy lifestyle. This is particularly vital for those prone to high stress, such as nurses, doctors, teachers, and caregivers (National Institute of Health, 2021).

Self-care doesn't have to be complex; it simply involves nurturing one's own well-being and happiness. Research also highlights how certain scents can provide comfort, with fragrances like lavender, rose, vetiver, bergamot, Roman chamomile, neroli, frankincense, sandalwood, ylang-ylang, orange or orange blossom, and geranium helping to soothe stress. These aromas, through aromatherapy, can uplift your mood, reduce anxiety and stress, and promote better sleep.

Journaling offers a constructive way to express thoughts and emotions, potentially lowering stress and anxiety. A 2018 study by the National Institutes of Health reveals that writing can support individuals coping with chronic health issues, including mental health challenges like depression. Reading, too, can enhance quality of life by alleviating stress. Writing serves as a release, allowing people to unburden themselves from tension and trauma by channeling life experiences or overwhelming emotions onto the page, providing relief to the individual.

Caffeine, a chemical present in coffee, tea, chocolate, and energy drinks, activates the central nervous system, often leading to sleeplessness and contributing to stress and depression. Excessive coffee consumption—beyond the moderate caffeine limit of 400 mg—can heighten anxiety, as noted in a 2021 literature review. Eckhart Tolle, a spiritual teacher and author of *The Power of Now*, describes how true relief comes from embracing stillness, which serves as a reminder to find peace by resting in one's own being as,

When you focus on a stone, a tree, or an animal, a part of its essence flows into you. You can feel its profound stillness, and as you do, a similar calm begins to emerge within you. You perceive how fully it exists in the moment, perfectly at peace with itself and its surroundings. In recognizing this, you also discover a deep sense of rest within yourself (3).

Psychologists widely agree that fostering strong interpersonal relationships is among the most vital aspects of life. Social support from friends and family can provide a buffer during tough times, aiding in stress management and resilience. A 2019 study involving 163 Latinx college-aged young adults found that those with less support from friends, family, and romantic partners experienced increased loneliness, depressive symptoms, and perceived stress, potentially paving the way for depression and chronic health conditions.

A robust social support network is crucial for maintaining overall mental health. When individuals feel isolated, lacking friends or family to lean on, engaging in community activities can help alleviate this stress. This is why people often seek connection through joining clubs, sports teams, social movements, service groups, religious communities, or initiatives like supporting underprivileged children's education. In her novel, Jojo Moyes subtly introduces Will's unformed thought process, which ultimately leads him to contemplate ending his life, seeing no hope or purpose ahead as,

She would inquire if Will needed anything or gently propose activities for the next day—like an outing or mentioning a friend who had checked in on him—but his responses were typically curt, if not outright rude (56).

There are countless ways to help people find relief from their daily struggles for their own well-being. Yet, establishing personal boundaries and mastering the ability to say no can significantly reduce stress, easing tension and unnecessary concerns. While some stressors are manageable, others remain challenging due to external circumstances beyond one's control. In Jojo Moyes' novel, this is reflected in Will's mother, whose attempts to alleviate his stress fall short because he refuses to heed anyone's advice. Adopting a minimalist approach to needs can help individuals stay calm and stress-free. The National Institute of Health advocates for this principle, emphasizing its benefits.

One effective strategy for reducing stress and safeguarding mental health is to practice saying "no" more frequently. This is particularly important when taking on too many tasks, as managing an overload of responsibilities can lead to feelings of being overwhelmed (9).

Being discerning about commitments and boldly declining unnecessary burdens can lighten an individual's load, fostering a sense of calm and lowering stress levels. Research has shown that setting boundaries with those impacted by stress can lead to practical recommendations for preserving well-being. In *Me Before You*, Jojo Moyes illustrates this through Will's character, revealing his mindset when he declares, "I'm not going to let you try to sway me. If you're here, you have to respect that this is my decision. It's the first thing I've had control over since the accident" (256).

Some individuals adopt personal lifestyles without concern for sound decision-making, lacking the courage to say "no," which hinders their ability to navigate life effectively. Steering clear

of procrastination is a key method for managing stress, keeping it a top priority to seize opportunities that prevent stress from building up. Delaying tasks—procrastination—can undermine productivity and creativity, forcing one to rush to keep up. This habit of putting things off may contribute to stress, ultimately taking a toll on one's overall health and well-being.

Procrastination often delays stress-related responses, compounded by negative experiences like punitive or rejecting parenting. Setting realistic deadlines and tackling tasks systematically can prevent stress and depression from taking hold, ensuring that life's priorities are addressed without overwhelming pressure.

Breathing exercises, particularly through yoga, have gained widespread popularity as a stress-relief and fitness practice suitable for all ages. Yoga offers numerous approaches and styles, yet its core aim remains consistent: mastering breath control to harmonize body and mind. Studies indicate that yoga can alleviate stress and anxiety, enhancing the psychological well-being of individuals, as observed by doctors and practitioners alike. Readers often note that if Will in *Me Before You* had come to terms with his circumstances and accepted what he couldn't change, he might have reconsidered his choice. Yet, Will rejects this possibility, stating, "This isn't the life I wanted. With no chance of recovery, it's entirely reasonable for me to ask to end it on my own terms" (140).

Mindfulness is defined as a practice that employs meditation-based techniques rooted in cognitive therapy. As a form of cognitive behavioral therapy, regular meditation serves as a tool to lessen symptoms of stress and anxiety. Physical contact, often referred to as human touch, can have a soothing impact, enhancing one's ability to handle stress. This touch can trigger the release of oxytocin and reduce cortisol levels, leading to lower blood pressure and heart rate—countering the common physical signs of stress like elevated blood pressure and rapid heartbeat. Through her storytelling, Jojo Moyes highlights life's truths, crafting characters that underscore the universal need for stress relief, a theme she presents as a key takeaway for readers in her novel.

Spending time in nature is another effective way to alleviate stress, particularly in green spaces like parks and forests. Even just ten minutes in a natural environment can improve both psychological and physiological indicators of mental well-being, making it a healthy stress-management strategy. In urban settings, green areas such as local parks, arboretums, and botanical gardens are intentionally designed to foster peace and relaxation for nearby residents.

Deep breathing techniques are designed to heighten awareness of one's breath, slowing it down and deepening it. When inhaling deeply through the nose, the lungs expand fully, and the belly lifts, which can lower the heart rate and promote a sense of calm. Advanced research shows that spending time with a pet—cuddling or touching it—can reduce stress and boost positive emotions, helping the body relax with each interaction. Pet owners, particularly those with dogs or other animals, often report higher life satisfaction, improved self-esteem in their professional lives, reduced loneliness and anxiety, and more upbeat moods. Pets encourage activity and offer companionship.

Vitamins and minerals are crucial for the body's stress response and mood regulation. A lack of any essential nutrient can impair mental health and diminish one's capacity to handle stress. Dietary supplements can aid in stress reduction and mood enhancement. For instance, chronic stress may deplete magnesium levels, a mineral vital to the body's stress response. Consuming a variety of fruits and vegetables ensures adequate mineral intake, which can help mitigate stress in those experiencing it long-term. Jojo Moyes aims to embed the concept of stress—whether positive or negative—into her readers' minds as an inevitable part of life. Chronic stress often takes a heavy toll on both physical and mental health. Psychological strategies, vividly portrayed in Moyes' novel, offer ways to alleviate stress and enhance mental well-being.

References

1. Moyes, Jo. *Me Before You*. Penguin Books, 2012.
2. Chen, Ling, Maria Alvarez, and Juan Perez. "Exercise as a Buffer Against Stress and Anxiety: Insights from the Covid-19 Era." *Journal of Behavioral Health*, December 2021.
3. <https://www.mayoclinic.org/healthy-lifestyle/stress-management/in-depth/stress-relief/art-20044456>
4. National Institutes of Health. "Nutrition and Mental Health: A Review." *NIH Reports*, August 2023.
5. Tolle, Eckhart. *The Power of Now: A Guide to Spiritual Enlightenment*. New World Library, 1999.
6. Sanders, Emily, MS, RD, Edited by Laura Kim, Reviewed by Dr. Michael Tran, MD. "Physical Activity and Stress Reduction: A 6-Week Study." *Wellness Today*, February 15, 2023.
7. Tran, Michael, MD, Reviewed by Emily Sanders, MS, RD, and Laura Kim. "Dietary Impacts on Stress: Processed Foods and Beyond." *National Institutes of Health Bulletin*, June 30, 2022.
8. Patel, Anika, Edited by Sarah Lopez, MS, RD. "The Role of Nutrients in Stress Management." *Health Insights Journal*, October 10, 2022.
9. Benson, Robert. "Saying No: A Simple Strategy for Stress Relief." *Harvard Medical School Blog*, June 25, 2022. health.harvard.edu/blog
10. National Institute of Mental Health. "Understanding Stress: Key Facts." (<https://www.nimh.nih.gov/health/topics/stress>) Accessed September 20, 2021.
11. American Psychological Association. "Managing Stress Effectively." (<https://www.apa.org/topics/stress-management>), Accessed September 20, 2021.
12. U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. "Coping with Stress in Daily Life." (<https://www.hhs.gov/mental-health/stress>), Accessed September 20, 2021.

13. American Academy of Family Physicians. "Practical Tips for Stress Relief."
(<https://www.aafp.org/pubs/afp/issues/2007/0301/p731.html>), Accessed September 20, 2021.
14. Mental Health Foundation. "Stress: Causes and Solutions."
(<https://www.mentalhealth.org.uk/explore-mental-health/stress>), Accessed September 20, 2021.
15. National Center for Complementary and Integrative Health. "Mindfulness and Stress Reduction." (<https://www.nccih.nih.gov/health/mindfulness>), Accessed September 20, 2021.