

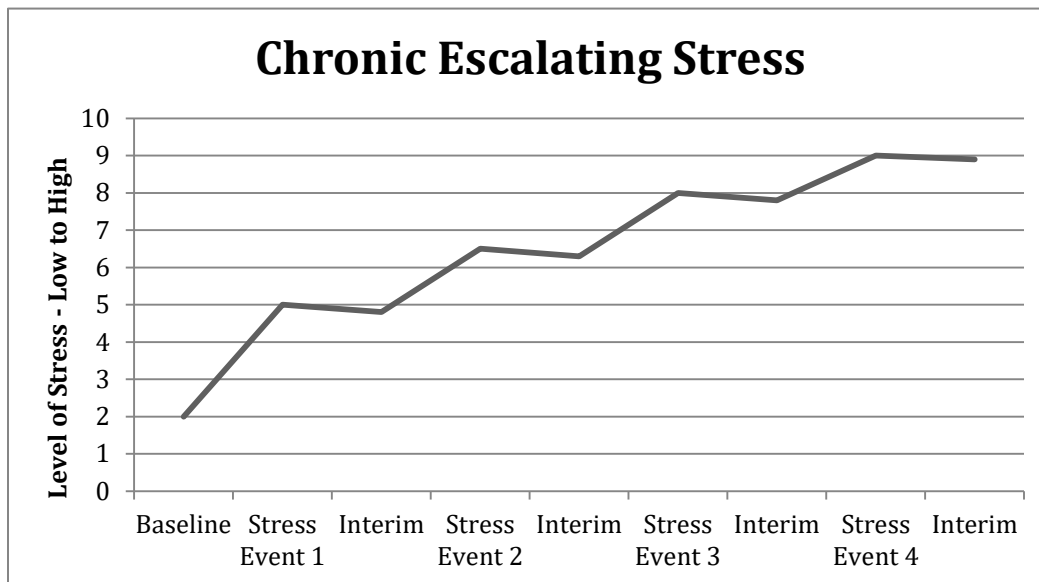
## Understanding Stress

### Definition and Context

Stress can be defined as the body's response to any demand, burden, or pressure. Therefore, we can conclude that anyone going through a crisis, will experience stress in the moment and afterwards. The level of stress one was experiencing prior to the crisis will also impact the magnitude of the stress experience.

### Chronic and Escalating Stress

Cross-cultural workers often find themselves in an environment of chronic, un-ending, and escalating stress. The graphic below illustrates this.



Notice that level stress or quiet times are followed by another stressful event; notice too that the quietness does not necessarily mean a return to the original baseline lower stress level. As a result, the last period of quiet is actually still a high level of stress, though it may be experienced as calm in the moment by the workers in that situation.

### Symptoms of Stress

Peer responders can help others to identify symptoms of stress and work on a plan to reduce overall stress as well as identify and understand stress responses to specific situations.<sup>i</sup>

**Physical:** increased heart rate, high blood pressure, dilated pupils, sweating, rapid breathing, dry mouth, stomach pain, headache, muscle tension, sleep problems, getting sick more frequently, having more accidents

**Mental:** trouble making decisions, poor concentration, inability to problem solve, not thinking clearly, memory problems

**Emotional:** anxious, sad, overwhelmed, pessimistic, irritable, angry

**Spiritual:** feeling disconnected from God, feeling punished by God, feeling like God is not listening

**Interpersonal:** increased conflict with others, less patient with others, feeling isolated

Additional Resources/Supporting Documents:

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<sup>1</sup> Developing Stress Hardiness (4.4) and Cross-Cultural Worker Stress Inventory (4.5)