

Fast lane leads to more stress than elsewhere - The Times of India

[Malathy Iyer](#), TNN | Dec 15, 2011, 07.25AM IST

MUMBAI: Mumbai's 24x7 rhythm has earned it many sobriquets, but there is a growing realization that the Maximum City's never-at-sleep tag comes at a costly price — namely, stress. High stress levels, say doctors, result from the zipzap-zoom lifestyle Mumbaikars are forced to adopt.

There is the lure of bigger salaries, better work culture, better infrastructure and opportunities. But if you consider aspects such as travelling like packed sardines, extra-long working hours and near-zero recreation facilities, Mumbaikars don't have it easy on many fronts.

Not surprisingly then, respondents in The Times Of India-IMRB Quality of Life Survey perceived Mumbaikars as being most stressed among residents of eight mega-cities. Mumbai scored a bleak 2 for the parameter Lifestyle (Relaxed) in the category Peace Of Mind.

Psychiatrist Dr Harish Shetty equates Mumbai's stress problem with five Is and one M. "There is growing insomnia, irritability, isolation, impulsivity and impotency, and there is a lot of mistrust. All this spells high stress," he says.

The city's social fabric has also undergone a change. "The city's strength was its heterogeneity and ability to absorb each and every section of society. But the same factor has now resulted in ghettos based on

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society. But the same factor has now resulted in ghettos based on
communities or eating habits," says Shetty. He also blames
competitiveness. "The thirst to keep up with the Joneses seems worse in
Mumbai. If your neighbour is going on a foreign trip, you want to keep up."

Psychiatrist Dr Bharat Shah, who consults at Lilavati Hospital, says, "The
city's geography is such that it doesn't help one relax." For instance,
travelling either north-south or east-west can be a chore. "The linear layout
only results in traffic bottlenecks, be it on roads or the railway," says Dr
Sanjay Kumawat, superintendent at Thane Mental Hospital.

Other aspects of travelling also leave Mumbaikars thoroughly stressed
out. "There is so much overcrowding that the quality of travel is poor. As a
result, one is bound to have a fight with a fellow commuter," says Dr Vishal
Sawant, who heads the psychiatry department of civic-run Cooper
Hospital, Juhu.

Mumbaikars find it hard to nullify the harmful effects of stress as rest and
recreation is practically an alien concept here. Says Shah, "Blame it on
transport or the need for extra competitiveness that forces people to work
more, but there is practically no time to rejuvenate or relax. The margin
between healthy and unhealthy is becoming narrower."

The strong middle-class quality of the city too is being eroded. "Drugs
were hitherto unheard of in conservative and middle-class society. But
now Vile Parle households are grappling with the habit," says Shetty.
Worse, the extended family support system is no longer around. "For
youngsters, celebrations mean heading to a bar," adds Kumawat.

While many Mumbaikars cope with stress by taking up yoga, gym or

hobbies, some fail to do so. "Daily stress can become distress. When this distress becomes chronic, there is a high chance of depression," says Shah.

There are no easy solutions, but Shetty recommends a simple strategy: smile and talk more with one another.

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