

Stress and Well-Being of Lawyers

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The present study aimed at finding out the difference between civil and criminal ten years experienced lawyers and lawyers doing internship on stress and wellbeing with a 2 x 2 factorial design. There were 20 lawyers in each group consisting of a total of 40 civil and 40 criminal lawyers. Aggarwal and Naidu's Life Stress Scale and Verma and Verma's PGI Well-being Scale were administered. ANOVA showed significant effect of practice experience on stress. t-test showed significantly much higher stress among criminal experienced lawyers than their counterpart civil lawyers. All the other comparisons were found to be non-significant. In case of well-being non-significant effects for all variables were obtained. Results were discussed in the light of nature of works, intricacies and risk involved in the criminal cases, and involvement of police and political pressure.

For the past decade the unanimous call for a greater understanding of physiological and occupational stress has echoed worldwide. Occupational stress is a term used to define ongoing stress that is related to the workplace. As with other forms of tension, occupation stress can eventually affect both physical and emotional well being if not managed effectively. Stress has individual and group level relevance as well as organization system implication. An individual's stress level can be increased by such varied factors as his or her personality, role conflicts or job designs. Role overload, role ambiguity, role conflict, group and political pressure, responsibility under participation, status incongruence, no profitability are so many dimensions of occupational stress. Social, psychological factors, individual factors and one's perception are also factors in occupational stress. Lynch (1997) studied the nature of occupational stress among public defenders in the New York State of all the potential stressors facing public defense counsel, the biggest stressors appear to be having no realistic trial option due to judicial sentencing policies designed to punish those who exercise their right to trial, potential cases going to trial without defense,

having too much work to do, the unpredictability of the trial occurrences, having to satisfy conflicting parties dealing with angry clients and fighting with prosecutors.

Well-being has been defined as a dynamic state characterized by a reasonable amount of harmony between individual's abilities, needs and expectations and environmental demands and opportunities (Levi, 1987). It connotes a harmonious satisfaction of one's desire and goals (Chekola, 1975). The two-factor theory of mental health advocates that absence of psychological ill-being or ill-health does not necessarily mean presence of psychological well-being. Hence a person can have both conditions poor, both conditions good, and any one of them good, with all its accompanying results (Verma, 1988). All in all, well-being comes from being connected and engaged, and from being enmeshed in a web of relationships and interests. They give meaning to our lives. Well-being influences practices of different professions, as all such endeavors aim to change humans for the better. It has been also found that stress arising from work, family conflicts, performance pressure and poor job prospects were

negatively associated with the level of work satisfaction among lawyers and other professionals (Chan & Lai, 2000).

During the past decade, researchers have found that of all the professionals, lawyers are the most prone to stress, depression and alcohol problems (Legal Brief, 2005). When lawyers talk of stress, they talk of constant pressure, office problems, dealing with difficult clients, exhaustion and loss of control while preparing and trying cases, and bailable hours. By seeking professional help and support, many are able to live more balanced and comfortable life. There is a higher incidence of stress among attorneys and judges than among other professionals (Hawaii Attorney and Judges Assistance Program). Elwork (2003) says when you practice law, stress comes with the territory. Surveys in 1995 have indicated that lawyer's dissatisfactions with the practice of law are on the increase. This includes dissatisfaction arising from both mental and physical stress, with over 70% of those surveyed complaining of intolerable pressures and tensions daily (Lectric Law Library's Stacks, 1995).

High level of stress among lawyers adversely affects wellbeing and cases related to human lives and properties are on stake. Keeping in view the above studies the present study aimed at finding out the degree of stress and well-being among civil and criminal lawyers. It should be kept in view that civil lawyers and criminal lawyers deal with property, and family disputes, and criminal cases respectively.

Method

Participants:

A total of 80 lawyers, 40 each civil and criminal lawyers were taken on incidental basis from district courts of Saharanpur. In each group 20 lawyers were having ten years of practice experience and 20 were doing internship.

Measures:

Life Stress Scale: Life stress scale developed by Aggarwal and Naidu (1986) was

used to measure the stress of lawyers. The Scale consists 30 items describing undesirable experiences and events likely to occur in the lives of people. These items are based on finance, family, society, education, ego, threat, bereavement, separation, personal setback and health of others. Participants had to rate their experiences on a 7 point scale ranging from "not at all distressing" to "unbearably distressing" on each item, which he/she had encountered in the previous one year. The test retest reliability of the Scale was 0.88 and its construct validity also indicated very high correlations among various measures of stress ($r = 0.39 - 0.94$).

PGI Well-Being Scale: PGI Well-being Scale of Verma and Verma (1989) was used to measure the well-being of the participants. It is a 20 item scale and the participants are required to tick the items applicable to them as they feel 'these days and in the past one month'. The total number of items ticked by the participants makes the total number of well-being score. The range of score on the Scale is 0 to 20. The split half reliability index of the scale by using Kudar-Richardson formula is reported to be 0.98 and its test-retest reliability index is reported to be 0.91.

Results and Discussion

It reveals that F-ratio of stress for civil and criminal lawyers was found to be 5.37 which was significant at .01 level of significance. F-ratio for length of practice was found to be .067 which was not significant at .05 level. F-ratio for the interaction of type of lawyers and length of practice came to be 8.265 which was significant at .05 level of significance. A look at the table-1 reveals that all the comparisons except one were found to be non-significant. Significant difference existed between the mean stress scores of criminal experienced and civil experienced lawyers in which case the mean of first group was 139.7 and that of the second group were 106.5, their SDs. were 29.89 and 32.54 respectively. t-value came to be 3.36 which was significant at .01 level of significance.

Table-1: Comparison of mean stress of different groups (N=20)

Groups	Mean	SD	t-Value
Criminal Internship Lawyers	119.95	15.39	0.39
Civil Internship Lawyers	123	31.34	
Criminal Experienced Lawyers	139.7	29.89	3.36**
Civil Experienced Lawyers	106.5	32.54	
Civil Internship Lawyers	123	31.34	1.63
Criminal Internship Lawyers	119.95	15.39	2.63
Criminal Experience Lawyers	139.7	29.89	

**p<0.01

Table-2: Comparison of mean well-being scores of different groups (N=20)

Groups	Mean	SD	t-Value
Criminal Internship Lawyers	13.3	3.29	0.69
Civil Internship Lawyers	12.65	2.46	
Criminal Experienced Lawyers	12.75	2.62	0.28
Civil Experienced Lawyers	12.5	3.13	
Civil Internship Lawyers	13.3	3.29	0.12
Criminal Experienced Lawyers	12.75	2.62	0.12
Civil Internship Lawyers	12.65	2.49	

The findings of the study revealed significant effect of types of lawyers' on stress. Mean scores indicated high degree of stress among criminal lawyers (M=129.80) than civil lawyers (M=114.75). It means criminal lawyers experienced greater degree of stress as compared to civil lawyers. The nature of work, responsibilities, number of intricacies and more than all lives of individuals are at stake in criminal cases. Law says that individuals should not be punished until their criminal acts are proved and substantiated by

the different sources of witness. Moreover, involvement of police and often administrative interference increase the degree of pressure which ultimately results in stress. It means that nature of job affects the level of stress. Legal Brief (2005) says that lawyers face the pressure of longer working weeks, as well as juggling their roles of lawyers and business people. Demanding workloads, more intricacies, the tyranny of bailable hours, competition, client expectations and above all responsibility of saving the life of an innocent persons, all wreak havoc more with the emotional health of criminal lawyers as compared to civil lawyers. The traumatic experiences leading to stress may be harmful for the physical and mental health of criminal lawyers. It has been found that attorneys working with traumatized clients experience significant symptoms of secondary trauma and burnout (Levin & Greisberg, 2004). The inter group comparisons revealed significant t-ratio only between means of criminal experienced and civil experienced lawyers where mean of criminal lawyers was significantly greater mean than civil lawyers. It means that experienced criminal lawyers experience more stress which is perhaps because the whole responsibilities of human life involved in criminal cases is shouldered by these lawyers and not by their juniors or those doing the internship. The juniors or internship lawyers do not have such responsibilities. This study affirms that senior criminal lawyers have stress beyond imagination as only the increased score of experienced criminal lawyers made F-ratio significant for type of lawyers. It is further strengthened by the significant interaction effect of type of lawyers and length of practice.

All the results related to well-being came to be non-significant. These findings enumerated that most of the lawyers' fraternity have shown same level of well-being and no differences were found on the types of lawyers and years of experience. The results are in consonance with the findings of Wallace (2009) in which he found that most lawyers in

the study (75%) said that they were satisfied with their life and that the conditions of their life are excellent (53%). The majority of the respondents (59%) said that they were in a very good or excellent health.

Earlier researches show that work demands, family demands, and work family conflict, all are directly related to the outcomes of poor physical health and increased life distress (Frone, Russell, & Cooper, 1992; Grondey & Cropanzano, 1999; Parasuraman, Purohit, Godshalk & Beutell, 1996). The findings are implicated that lawyers are satisfied with their job; the success they have achieved so far in their legal careers will be helpful in maintaining their existing well-being. Hence, despite of the long hours, conflicting role demands and stressors, the lawyers in the study in general showed equal degree of well-being barring their type of works or practice and experience.

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