



Occupational Stress Among India's District Judges: An Exploratory Study

SHIVARAJ HUCHHANAVAR

SHAMIM MOHAMMAD

VIKASH VAIBHAV

**Author affiliations can be found in the back matter of this article*

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ABSTRACT

The study explores occupational stress among Indian district judges based on their perceptions of its causes and symptoms. It also investigates the extent to which judges attribute illnesses suffered by themselves or their colleagues to occupational stress. A representative sample of 65 judges was drawn from more than 13 High Court jurisdictions, with 50 judges completing a self-administered questionnaire comprising 119 variables. Descriptive measures, such as frequency estimates and statistical procedures, Chi-Square and linear regression tests, were used to analyze the data. The results indicate that the judges, inter alia, perceive (a) heavy workload and lack of control over the caseload; (b) the occupational demand for continued and extensive study; (c) too much subordination to, or too much interference from, the high court; (d) apprehension of frivolous complaints to vigilance; and (e) the Bar antagonism, as key stressors. Therefore, this perception-based study identifies multiple occupational factors causing stress among district judges in India. Regression analysis also finds that the tenure of judges has no bearing on their perception of occupational stress.

CORRESPONDING AUTHOR:

Dr Shivaraj Huchhanavar

PhD in Law, Associate
Professor, Jindal Global
Law School, OP Jindal
Global University, Sonapat,
Haryana, India

shivashk100@gmail.com

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‘Judicial stress’, once considered an ‘unmentionable topic,’¹ is now a universally recognized challenge facing judges and judiciaries.² Unsurprisingly, India is no exception to this; judges – from the Supreme Court to subordinate courts – now acknowledge judicial stress and its harmful consequences.³ The complex nature of duties that judges are called upon to discharge, mounting work pressure and increasing societal expectations have made judicial life increasingly stressful.⁴ Recent studies in other jurisdictions show that the legal profession, jury duty and judgeship are among inherently stressful occupations.⁵ The literature indicates that judges face heightened stress as a result of work overload, the type of advocates appearing before them, the backlog of cases and social isolation.⁶ The UNDOC reported that 92% of judges feel that judicial work brings them stress; 89% of the respondent judges know of circumstances where their judicial colleagues experiencing stress or anxiety. Almost all judges (97%) opined that more prominence should be given to promoting judicial well-being.⁷ The studies also show that there is a significant level of burnout in judges.⁸ Besides, judges more frequently encounter emotionally demanding situations compared to other professionals;⁹ as the

1 Michael Kirby, “Judicial Stress” (Speech at Annual Conference of the Local Courts of New South Wales (NSW), NSW, 1995), <http://www.lawfoundation.net.au/ljf/app/&id=E812A4B4C60E3A26CA2571A8002344A5>, accessed 16 January 2024. Unless otherwise stated, all URLs were last accessed 11 March 2025.

2 United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, “Exploring Linkages Between Judicial Well-Being and Judicial Integrity,” *Global Judicial Integrity Network* (2022): 1–42 (hereinafter UNODC, *Judicial Well-being Report* 2022), https://www.unodc.org/res/ji/resdb/data/2022/exploring_linkages_between_judicial_well-being_and_judicial_integrity_html/Global_Report_Judicial_Well-being.pdf, accessed 16 August 2024; Carly Schrever, “Judicial stress, The unmentionable and the undeniable: A summary of Australia’s first empirical research measuring stress in judicial work,” *United Nations Development Programme* (2024): 1–12, <https://www.undp.org/asia-pacific/judicial-integrity/publications/judicial-stress-unmentionable-and-undeniable>, accessed 16 August 2024; Debayan Roy, “Judges Wilting Under Strain; Stress in Listing Cases Is Enormous: CJI DY Chandrachud,” *The Bar and Bench (Bangalore, November 24, 2022)*; “Breakdown moments in apex court: Judges are not immune to stress” *Times of India (Mumbai, November 25, 2019)*.

3 UNODC, *Judicial Well-being Report* 2022 and Schrever, *Judicial Stress*; Justice Anand Venkatesh, “Their Lordships Are ‘Also Humans!’” *Live Law (March 20, 2020)*, <https://www.livelaw.in/columns/their-lordships-are-also-humans—154457>; Debayan Roy, “Judges Wilting Under Strain”; Rahul Kumar, “Judging Under Stress: What It Does to Judges,” *The Daily Guardian (September 11, 2020)*; Press Trust of India, “In The Digital Era, Judging Is Under Stress, Says Supreme Court Judge A.K.Sikri,” *The Print* (New Delhi, February 10, 2019).

4 Dhananjay Mahapatra, “Breakdown Moments in Apex Court: Judges Are Not Immune To Stress,” *Times of India* (2019), <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/india/breakdown-moments-in-apex-court-judges-are-not-immune-to-stress/articleshow/72215292.cms>.

5 See, for example, Thomas L. Hafemeister and William L. Ventis, “Juror Stress: What Burden Have We Placed On Our Juries?” *State Court Journal* 16, no. 4 (1992): 35–46; Carly Schrever et al., “Where Stress Presides: Predictors And Correlates Of Stress Among Australian Judges And Magistrates,” *Psychiatry, Psychology and Law* 29, no. 2 (2022): 290–322; Monica K. Miller, et al., “An Examination of Outcomes Predicted by the Model of Judicial Stress,” *The Bolch Judicial Institute at Duke Law* (2018), <https://judicature.duke.edu/wp-content/uploads/2022/07/STRESS-For-Web.pdf>.

6 Rahul Kumar, “Judging ‘Under Stress’: What It Does To Judges,” *The Daily Guardian (September 11, 2020)*, <https://thedailyguardian.com/judging-under-stress-what-it-does-to-judges/>.

7 Schrever, *Judicial Stress*.

8 See, for example, Schrever et al., *Where Stress Presides*.

9 Mare Teichmann et al., “Sources of Occupational Pressure among Lawyers and Legal Professionals” *International and Comparative Law Review* (2015) 15(1): 87–107.

judges undertake to resolve others' problems, it puts them at risk of experiencing an unhealthy mental state.¹⁰ As a result, judges are often overwhelmed with the amount of trauma exposure at their workplace, and the nature of the cases brought up for hearing before them, such as victim violence and divorce cases.¹¹ Distressed judges may exhibit signs of mental and physical exhaustion, such as short temper, loss of appetite and sleep, depressed mood, reduced interest, irritability, poor quality of judicial decisions, job dissatisfaction, absenteeism, tardiness, panic attacks, inappropriate behavior, and substance dependence.¹² Against this backdrop, this study explores various causes and symptoms of judicial stress among Indian district judges. The analysis begins with a brief outline of its scope and theoretical background in Section II, followed by methodology in Section III, key findings in Section IV, a discussion of results in Section V, and a conclusion in Section VI.

II. THE SCOPE AND THE THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The issues of judicial well-being have gained significant attention in recent years. For instance, the Nauru Declaration (2024) underscores the critical importance of judicial well-being.¹³ The Declaration stresses the multifaceted nature of judicial well-being that encompasses occupational, physical, social, cognitive, emotional, and spiritual aspects of the judicial officeholders' lives.¹⁴ It acknowledges that the judiciary, while exemplifying core values such as independence, impartiality, and integrity,¹⁵ is fundamentally a human system dependent on the collective capacities of individual judges. In the wake of the Nauru Declaration, there has been a renewed emphasis on judicial stress. However, despite the growing focus on this issue globally, there is a dearth of empirical studies in India on the topic. This gap in the literature presents a significant opportunity for researchers to contribute to the understanding of occupational stress among Indian judges and to inform evidence-based interventions to support judicial well-being.

While empirical studies on judicial stress in India are lacking, the global literature on judicial stress underscores the nature, source, prevalence and severity of judicial stress;¹⁶ there is also growing emphasis on mitigating measures at the individual and institutional levels.¹⁷ The literature is also informed by various theories that examine

10 Justice Venkatesh, *Their Lordships Are 'Also Humans'!*

11 Jennie Cole-Mossman, et al., "Reducing Judicial Stress through Reflective Practice," *The Journal of American Judges Association* 54 (2018): 90–94; Kevin O'Sullivan, et al., "Judicial Work And Traumatic Stress: Vilification, Threats, And Secondary Trauma On The Bench," *Psychology, Public Policy, and Law* 28, no. 4 (2022): 532–545.

12 Isaiah M. Zimmerman, "Stress – What It Does to Judges and How It Can Be Lessened," *Judges' Journal* 20, no. 3 (Summer 1981): 18–22; Simone Marstiller, "An Ounce of Prevention: Knowing the Causes and Signs of Judicial Stress and Getting Help Before Impairment Leads to Ethics Complaints," *Counterbalance* 31, no. 8 (2015), <https://louisianajlap.com/wp-content/uploads/2015/04/judgesannounceofprevention.pdf>, accessed 16 January 2024.

13 United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, *Nauru Declaration on Judicial Well-being* 2024, <https://judicialwellbeing.info/wp-content/uploads/2024/07/Nauru-Declaration-on-Judicial-Well-being.pdf>.

14 UNODC, *Nauru Declaration*, para 1.

15 UNODC, *Nauru Declaration*, para 7.

16 See above, Schrever, *Judicial Stress*.

17 See above, UNODC, *Judicial Well-being Report* 2022.

(occupational) stress from specific lenses. For instance, the institutional theory underscores that complex institutional structure, internal governance mechanisms, and socially detached working conditions as the leading causes of judicial stress.¹⁸ The role stress theory emphasizes that role complexity, ambiguity, overload and changing dynamics of judicial office are the key contributors to judicial stress.¹⁹ The occupational burnout theory presupposes that prolonged exposure to high levels of occupational stress can lead to burnout.²⁰ Similarly, the secondary traumatic stress theory concludes that exposure to traumatic and emotionally demanding cases affects judges' stress levels.²¹ Although these are not mutually exclusive theories, they tend to examine judicial stress from a narrow theoretical frame, which may not offer a comprehensive and holistic view of judicial stress.

Recent scholarship has adopted a more comprehensive approach to understanding judicial stress, addressing the limitations of individual theories by incorporating a broad-based theoretical framework. For instance, the Model of Judicial Stress²² locates judicial stress at the intersection of judicial well-being, judicial efficiency, integrity, independence and public trust.²³ Similarly, a broad-based theoretical framework employed by UNODC facilitated a more nuanced exploration of the various dimensions of judicial stress and its interconnections with judicial well-being, integrity, and performance.²⁴ While acknowledging its narrow scope [see Section V], the current study also employs a broad-based theoretical framework that helps identify and analyze the etiological factors and manifestations of occupational stress among Indian district judges. In particular, the paper attempts to answer the following questions: How do Indian district judges perceive occupational stress? What aspects of their occupational life are most stressful? And, what are the notable symptoms that judges perceive to be caused by occupational stress?

This research emphasizes the tripartite role of judges—adjudicative, administrative, and coordinative—recognizing that stress can emanate from and impact each of these domains differently. Furthermore, the study draws upon personal and occupational stress triggers, acknowledging the complex interplay between individual characteristics and institutional factors in shaping judicial stress experiences. By adopting this holistic approach, the research aims to provide a more comprehensive understanding of the stress among district judges in India, contributing to the

18 Paula Casaleiro, et al., "A Critical Review of Judicial Professionals Working Conditions' Studies," *International Journal for Court Administration* 12, no. 1 (2021): 2, <https://doi.org/10.36745/ijca.334>; Sandra P. M. Pereira, et al., "The Conceptual Model of Role Stress and Job Burnout in Judges: The Moderating Role of Career Calling," *Laws* 11, no. 3 (2022): 42, <https://doi.org/10.3390/laws11030042>.

19 Pereira, et al., *Conceptual Model of Role Stress and Job Burnout in Judges*, 42.

20 See, for example, Schreier et al., *Where Stress Presides*.

21 Kevin O'Sullivan, et al., "Judicial Work and Traumatic Stress: Vilification, Threats, and Secondary Trauma on the Bench," *Psychology, Public Policy, and Law* 28, no. 4 (2022): 532–545; Monica K. Miller et. al., "Judicial Stress: The Roles of Gender and Social Support," *Psychiatry, Psychology and Law* 25 no. 4 (2018): 602–618; Peter Muchemi and John Kanjogu Kiumi, "Age Differences in Secondary Traumatic Stress Levels among Judges and Magistrates in Rift Valley Region, Kenya." *Research on Humanities and Social Sciences* 7 (2017): 68–78.

22 Miller, et al., *An Examination of Outcomes Predicted by the Model of Judicial Stress*; UNODC, *Judicial Well-being Report* 2022.

23 See, for example, UNODC, *Judicial Well-being Report* 2022.

24 UNODC, *Judicial Well-being Report* 2022.

growing body of literature on judicial well-being and its implications for the effective administration of justice.

The broad-based theoretical framework aligns with recent trends in judicial stress research, which recognize the need for context-specific investigations that can capture the unique challenges faced by judges in different jurisdictions and at various levels of the judicial hierarchy. By focusing on district judges in India, this study addresses a significant gap in the literature, offering insights into a crucial yet understudied segment of the Indian judiciary.

III. MATERIALS AND METHOD

Participants: The data on judicial stress was collected during the two conferences on judicial stress management held at the National Judicial Academy [NJA] of India in 2016 and 2017.²⁵ The conferences were designed and approved by the National Judicial Academic Council.²⁶ The questionnaire was part of the training design.²⁷ These conferences were attended by the District and Sessions Judges from different High Court jurisdictions across India. The participant judges were nominated by their respective High Courts on a rotational basis without regard to their exposure to occupational stress. Their selection as the respondents for this study was also not influenced by any known or reported instances of judicial stress. Out of a total of 65 judges, 38 and 27 judges attended the first and second conferences, respectively; 50 (76.9%) of these participants responded to the questionnaire. The responses of these 50 participants were analyzed using averages (percentages), and the Chi-Square Test of Independence procedure.

Questionnaire: The first part of the questionnaire aimed to collect relevant personal details of the respondents, including their name, length of service, high court jurisdiction, and the number of training programs they attended on stress and coping mechanisms. However, this part, like the other parts of the questionnaire, was optional. The second part aimed to assess the respondents' general understanding of stress, given that the conferences were the participant judges' first colloquium on judicial stress.

The second part of the questionnaire consists of 119 items which were further divided into ten sections.²⁸ The role of judges involves adjudicative, administrative,

²⁵ The first Annual Conference on Stress Management [P-1021] was held on April 15–16, 2016, and the second conference titled the National Seminar for Principal District and Sessions Judges on Stress Management [P-1049] was held on September 22–24, 2017. For further details, see “Details of Concluded Programmes” *National Judicial Academy of India*, https://nja.gov.in/Concluded_Programmes.html, accessed 13 January 2024.

²⁶ National Judicial Academic Council, <https://nja.gov.in/NJAC.html>; see *National Seminar for Principal District and Sessions Judges on Stress Management*, Programme No 1049, *Academic Calendar 2017–2018: Thematic Framework*, page 15, [https://nja.gov.in/Academic_Calendars/ACADEMIC%20CALENDAR%202017-18%20\(Thematic%20Framework\)\(20-01-2018\).pdf](https://nja.gov.in/Academic_Calendars/ACADEMIC%20CALENDAR%202017-18%20(Thematic%20Framework)(20-01-2018).pdf); see also *Annual Conference on Stress Management*, Programme No 1021, *Academic Calendar 2016–2017: Thematic Framework*, page 32, [https://nja.gov.in/Academic_Calendars/ACADEMIC%20CALENDAR%202016-17%20\(Thematic%20Framework\)\(03-10-2016\).pdf](https://nja.gov.in/Academic_Calendars/ACADEMIC%20CALENDAR%202016-17%20(Thematic%20Framework)(03-10-2016).pdf).

²⁷ For the relevant annual calendar of the *National Judicial Academy of India*, see *Academic Calendar*, <https://nja.gov.in/>.

²⁸ Section 10 sought descriptive responses from judges. The brief outline of the nine domains is as follows: the number of variables in each sub-section is given in parentheses. Section 1: Personal details (4); Section 2: Correctness of stress-related statements (6);

and coordinative functions that require interactions with various institutional actors, leading to stress. Therefore, Sections 3 and 4 attempted to identify key stressors for judges, covering various challenges that a judicial officeholder could face; Section 4 was focused on stressors specific to the judging stage. Section 5 of the questionnaire aimed to gauge personal stress triggers in judges, while Section 6 focused on other occupational stressors. Section 7 emphasized service conditions that may cause stress. Sections 4 and 7 were, with some modifications, adapted from the Judicial Stress Inventory.²⁹ Overall, the questionnaire accounted for common stressors among judges, as reported by various studies, such as workload, time constraints, social isolation, complexity of cases, pressure from media, uncooperative Bar, inadequate or unskilled staff, safety concerns, lack of physical resources, frequent transfers, and tension among colleagues and staff.³⁰

In sections 2–7 of the survey instrument, where existing literature did not provide robust evidence for the stress-inducing potential of certain items among judges, respondents were presented with a modified response scale. Judges were asked to indicate whether these items would cause stress “very often,” “rarely,” or “not at all.” This approach was adopted to allow for greater flexibility in judges’ responses and to potentially capture stress factors that may be unique to the Indian judicial context or underrepresented in the global literature. It also enables a rough estimation of the frequency of stress. By employing this method, the study aimed to identify potential stressors that might not have been extensively documented in previous research, thus contributing to a more comprehensive understanding of judicial stress in the Indian setting.

Sections 8 and 9 aimed to find answers to the following question: do judges attribute some of the illnesses (physical and/or mental) they or their colleagues suffer to occupational stress? Section 10 of the questionnaire aimed to collect qualitative data on judicial stress through descriptive responses; the analysis of these descriptive data is beyond the scope of this paper, as it focuses on coping mechanisms and the institutional response to judicial stress.

Frequency: The questionnaire focused primarily on the frequency of stress-inducing factors rather than the intensity of stress experienced. This methodological choice was informed by several considerations and supported by existing literature on judicial stress research. Firstly, the study aims to identify and understand the prevalence of various stressors among the district judges rather than conducting a clinical assessment of

Section 3: Important stressors in judges (23); Section 4: Stresses of the judges at the judging stage (21); Section 5: Personal stress triggers that may cause stress in judges (8); Section 6: Infrastructure limitation that may cause stress in judges (9); Section 7: Conditions of services which may cause stress in judges (10); Section 8: Psychological signs and symptoms found in judges (23); Section 9: Physiological signs and symptoms found in judges (15).

29 Tracy D. Eells and C. Robert Showalter, “Work-related stress in American trial judges,” *Bulletin of the American Academy of Psychiatry and the Law* 22 no. 1 (1994): 71–83.

30 Monica K. Miller, et al., “Judicial Stress: The Roles of Gender and Social Support,” *Psychiatry, Psychology and Law* 25 no. 4 (2018): 602–618; Tracy D. Eells and C. Robert Showalter, *Work-related stress in American trial judges*, 71–83; David M. Flores, et al., “Judges’ Perspectives on Stress and Safety in the Courtroom: An Exploratory Study,” *Court Review* 45 no. 3 (2008–2009): 76–89; Alexis Resnick, et al., “Surviving Bench Stress,” *Family Court Review* 49 no.3 (2011): 610–617; Kevin O’Sullivan, et al., “Judicial Work and Traumatic Stress: Vilification, Threats, and Secondary Trauma on the Bench,” *Psychology, Public Policy, and Law* 28, no. 4 (2022): 532–545; Isaiah M. Zimmerman, “Helping Judges in Distress,” *Judicature* 90, (2006): 10–15.

stress levels. This approach aligns with previous research on occupational stress, which emphasizes the importance of identifying stressors as a crucial step in developing effective interventions.³¹ Secondly, the focus on frequency rather than intensity allowed for a more comprehensive exploration of potential stressors across various domains of judicial work. This approach is consistent with the multidimensional nature of judicial stress as described in the Model of Judicial Stress, which recognizes that stressors can arise from multiple sources and vary in their occurrence.³² Thirdly, measuring the intensity of stress would necessitate more invasive clinical methods, which judges might be reluctant to consent to. Consequently, any attempt to assess the intensity of occupational stressors could have led to some judges declining to participate in our study. Further, the perception-based methodology would not be effective in measuring the intensity of stress. In light of these reasons and constraints, the study focuses on the frequency of stressors through self-report questionnaires, which is also a well-established approach in occupational stress research³³ and has been successfully employed in previous studies on judicial stress.³⁴

Furthermore, the methodology allows for the identification of both common and rare stressors, providing a nuanced understanding of the judicial stress landscape. This is particularly valuable in the Indian context, where there is a dearth of empirical research on judicial stress, making it crucial to cast a wide net in identifying potential stressors. While acknowledging the limitation of not measuring stress intensity, this study's focus on frequency and the judges' perceptions of causes and consequences provides valuable insights into the judicial stress phenomenon in India. This approach lays the groundwork for future research that may incorporate more intensive measures of stress, including physiological and clinical assessments.

Data analysis: The SPSS software (v25, 2019) was used for the data analysis. The variables having 50% or more in the "agree" or "very often" were retained for further analysis. The Likert scales had "very often", "rarely" and "not all" options; the percentage of "very often" and "rarely" were added, and the top-five variables having a positive relationship with judicial stress have been reported. This is because, in sections 3 to 8, too many variables were crossing the threshold of 50%. The researchers intended to highlight the most significant variable that positively relates to judicial stress. Pearson's Chi-Square (χ^2) test was performed to identify relationships between the variables within and across the domains. Chi-Square (χ^2) procedures were also used to establish relationships within and across the domains amongst the various variables, with that of the experience of judges. The degree of associations between nominal variables was assessed with Phi (Θ) coefficient.

31 Jared Chamberlain and Monica K. Miller, "Evidence of Secondary Traumatic Stress, Safety Concerns, and Burnout Among a Homogeneous Group of Judges in a Single Jurisdiction," *Journal of the American Academy of Psychiatry and the Law* 37 no.2 (2009): 214–224; Cary L. Cooper and Judi Marshall, "Occupational Sources of Stress: A Review of the Literature Relating to Coronary Heart Disease and Mental Ill Health," *Journal of Occupational Psychology* 49 no.1 (1976): 11–28.

32 Jared Chamberlain and Monica K. Miller, *Evidence of Secondary Traumatic Stress*.

33 Robert Karasek, et al., "The Job Content Questionnaire (JCQ): An Instrument for Internationally Comparative Assessments of Psychosocial Job Characteristics," *Journal of Occupational Health Psychology* 3 no. 4 (1998): 322–355.

34 See, for example, Carly Schrever et al., "The Psychological Impact of Judicial Work: Australia's First Empirical Research Measuring Judicial Stress and Wellbeing," *Journal of Judicial Administration* 28 no.3 (2019), 141–168. https://www.judcom.nsw.gov.au/publications/benchbks/judicial_officers/psychological_impact_of_judicial_work.html.

To go beyond the correlation between two variables, we further undertake analysis using linear regression. We construct two dependent variables for our regression analyses: (a) psychological and (b) physiological stress symptoms among the district judges. We construct these two variables by taking the mean of the responses to the survey questions. Thus, the level of psychological stress is arrived at by taking the mean of the 22 items in section 7 of the questionnaire. Similarly, the psychological stress level is constructed by taking the mean of the 15 items in section 8 of the questionnaire.

We construct four sets of explanatory variables by taking the mean of the responses, similar to that for the dependent variable discussed above. These relate to stress concerns at the judging stage (20 items), workplace limitations (8 items), personal issues (7 items), and factors related to service conditions (9 items). Additionally, we account for the judges' experience category (in years), hoping to find if the length of the tenure has any bearing on judges' perception of occupational stress.

Our regression equation is as follows: Y_i represents the dependent variable we wish to explain. We take two dependent variables: psychological and physiological stressors. The X_i denotes the set of explanatory factors noted in the preceding paragraph. ϵ_i denotes the random error. The constant term (α) accounts for the intercept term in the regression line. The subscript (i) denotes the observations.

$$Y_i = \alpha + \beta * X_i + \epsilon_i$$

IV. RESULTS

REPRESENTATION OF DISTRICT JUDGES

Responses from 50 (out of 65) judges were received.³⁵ Demographic data show that the study sample is representative of district judges from rural and small urban jurisdictions across India. Out of 50 judges, only 21 (42%) disclosed their respective high court jurisdictions.³⁶ Those who disclosed their jurisdictions represented 13 high courts of the country. There were two participant judges from the High Court of Bombay, Chhattisgarh, Delhi, Gujarat, Jharkhand and Madhya Pradesh, respectively; one each from the High Court of Kolkata, Kerala, Meghalaya, Patna, Rajasthan and Uttarakhand. Notably, the Karnataka High Court has the highest representation with three judges, and the remaining 29 judges did not specify their associated jurisdictions.

THE LENGTH OF SERVICE OF PARTICIPANT DISTRICT JUDGES

There is no clear empirical evidence to suggest that length of service has a significant correlation with stress levels among judges, indicating that judicial stress affects judges regardless of their experience or years on the bench.³⁷ Therefore, with a view to carrying out a regression analysis, the study aimed at eliciting data on this variable.

³⁵ Baseline characteristics of 15 non-respondents (23.1%) did not differ significantly from those of the 50 respondents.

³⁶ Note: To avoid needless repetition of statistical data, where a table delineates a more detailed distribution of percentages, frequencies, and the total number of responses for each variable, the authors have not provided the pertinent statistical data in the results section. Please refer to the respective tables for relevant statistical details.

³⁷ Tracy D. Eells and C. Robert Showalter, *Work-related stress*, 71–83.

The average tenure of the judges was found to be 16.9 years, with a standard deviation of 9.55 years. Of the 50 participant judges, 19 had held their judicial positions for less than ten years. Meanwhile, ten judges possessed work experience spanning 11 to 20 years, and 16 had served for more than 21 years in the judiciary.

JUDGES' LEVEL OF UNDERSTANDING OF STRESS

There is a growing awareness in the judiciary and among judges about the implications of stress. However, it is important for judges to recognize that they can both experience stress as victims and contribute to it as causes. Therefore, the study aimed at gauging the level of understanding of judges about stress in general. For this purpose, Section 2 of the questionnaire had six variables to gauge the 'understanding of judges on stress'. Judges overwhelmingly (70%; $n = 35$) agreed that anxiety and stress are normal, and stress is a state of tension that makes a tough situation worse (56%; $n = 28$). Most of the judges (77%; $n = 37$) also recognized that the stress response involves the nervous system and specific hormones in the body, enhancing its ability to perform under pressure, and stress depletes one's resources and weakens the immune system (52%; $n = 25$). Most of the judges agreed (80%; $n = 40$) that people feel nervous or jumpy when they are stressed. Overall, participant judges showed a very good understanding of stress and its psychosomatic implications.

The study also intended to know whether stress concerns are addressed in judicial education and training. In this regard, the questionnaire sought details on a number of stress-related training sessions attended by judges during their tenure. For most of the judges, the stress management program at the National Judicial Academy was the only stress-related program that they attended, but a small percentage (18%; $n = 9$) of judges attended some other therapies/sessions on stress.

WHAT ARE THE KEY STRESSORS AMONG INDIA'S DISTRICT JUDGES?

Section 2 of the questionnaire aimed at identifying key stressors among judges. [Table 1](#) reports stressors that a majority (50% or more) of judges identified to be stressors. Most of the judges perceive heavy workload (88%, $n = 44$), apprehension of frivolous complaints (73.46%, $n = 36$), too many administrative responsibilities (72.91%, $n = 35$), antagonism of Bar (69.38%, $n = 34$) and lack of control over people appearing before them (63.26%, $n = 31$) as the most prominent stressors. Judges also felt that withholding job incentives, the need for excessive control over the work environment, sensitive matters and extensive and continued study as contributors to bench stress ([Table 1](#)). All these stress-causing aspects emanate from the nature of the job that the judges do, except for 'personal/family problems' that the judges have also attributed to stress.

STRESS CONCERNS OF DISTRICT JUDGES AT THE JUDGING STAGE

Some of the adjudicative aspects, such as "sensitive cases" have already been identified as stressors by judges ([Table 1](#)). However, [Table 2](#) adds nuance by specifically highlighting stressors at the judging stage. The judging stage encompasses the entire duration of proceedings in both civil and criminal cases. While judges formally render decisions at the conclusion of a trial, they also make key determinations throughout the proceedings. These determinations include, for example, granting bail

SN	STRESSORS	PERCENTAGE (FREQUENCY)		
		AGREE	DISAGREE	NOT SURE
1	Heavy workload	88 (44)	10 (5)	2 (1)
2	Apprehension of frivolous complaints to vigilance	73.46 (36)	18.36 (9)	8.16 (4)
3	Too many administrative and extra judicial responsibilities	72.91 (35)	20.83 (10)	6.25 (3)
4	Bar Antagonism	69.38 (34)	22.44 (11)	8.16 (4)
5	Lack of control over the people appearing before them (ill-prepared, inadequate, or abusive counsel)	63.26 (31)	30.61 (15)	6.12 (3)
6	Absence of control over the caseload	60.41 (29)	31.25 (15)	8.33 (4)
7	Personal/family problems of the judge	58.33 (28)	35.41 (17)	6.25 (3)
8	Sensitive matters	57.14 (28)	34.69 (17)	8.16 (4)
9	Withholding job incentives like promotions, increments, convenient transfers, etc.	55.10 (27)	34.69 (17)	12.75 (5)
10	Increased public expectation	55.10 (27)	36.73 (18)	8.16 (4)
11	Need for extensive and continued study	52.08 (25)	37.50 (18)	10.41(5)
12	Excessive need to control one's environment	51.02 (25)	38.77 (19)	10.20 (5)

Table 1 Key stressors among district judges.

SN	STRESSORS	PERCENTAGE (FREQUENCY)		
		VERY OFTEN	RARELY	NOT AT ALL
1	Highly technical cases	12.50 (6)	58.33 (28)	29.16 (14)
2	Deciding with no satisfactory outcomes	12.24 (6)	59.18 (29)	28.57 (14)
3	Execution of judgment is difficult	16.00 (8)	54.00 (27)	30.00 (15)
4	Want of sufficient evidence	38.77 (19)	30.61 (15)	30.61 (15)
5	Adjudicating matters with high judicial discretion	12.24 (6)	48.97 (24)	38.77 (19)
6	Issues involving legal vs moral perspective	14.00 (7)	46.00 (23)	40.00 (20)

Table 2 Stress concerns of district judges at the judging stage.

in criminal cases and deciding interlocutory applications in civil cases. Therefore, the questionnaire aimed to capture various aspects of judicial proceedings. In total, there were 20 prompts addressing different aspects of judicial proceedings.

The summary of the results reveals that in cases where court cases are highly technical, lack satisfactory outcomes, or involve challenging judgment execution, over 70% of judges perceive such cases as stressors, either “very often” or “rarely”

(Table 2). Moreover, as reported by participant judges, a significant majority of judges experience stress either “very often” or “rarely” in situations where determinations are difficult due to insufficient evidence (69%), cases requiring extensive judicial discretion (61.21%), or cases raising moral and legal questions (60%). Table 2 provides a detailed breakdown of the percentages across domains.

WORKPLACE LIMITATIONS THAT MAY CAUSE STRESS IN DISTRICT JUDGES

Analysis of the survey responses revealed several key workplace stressors as perceived by the participating judges. The most prevalent concerns, by the combined percentage of “very often” and “rarely” responses, are: (a) inadequate staff (97.92%, n = 48); (b) lack of ICT infrastructure (83.33%, n = 40); (c) unfurnished courtrooms (77.54%, n = 38); (d) unmanageable staff (72%, n = 36); (e) conflict with court staff and lawyers (68%, n = 34); and (f) seniority-based elevation (60%, n = 31). Table 3 provides a more granular analysis, including the breakdown of responses across “very often”, “rarely”, and “not at all” categories, as well as the total number of responses for each item.

SN	STRESSORS	PERCENTAGE (FREQUENCY)		
		VERY OFTEN	RARELY	NOT AT ALL
1	Inadequate staff	71.42 (35)	26.53 (13)	2.04 (1)
2	Lack of ICT infrastructure	43.75 (21)	39.58 (19)	16.66 (8)
3	Unfurnished courtrooms	48.97 (24)	28.57 (14)	22.44 (11)
4	Unmanageable staff	36.00 (18)	36.00 (18)	28.00 (14)
5	Conflict with court staff and lawyers	22.00 (11)	46.00 (23)	32.00 (16)
6	Seniority-based elevation	26.00 (13)	34 (17)	40 (20)

Table 3 Workplace/infrastructural limitations that may cause stress in district judges.

PERSONAL STRESS TRIGGERS IN DISTRICT JUDGES

Most of the judges (81.25%, n = 39) perceived “frequent interruptions in children’s education because of transfers” as a notable stressor. Judges (84%, n = 42) also viewed that the demise of parents and other relatives or the ill health of aged parents would cause stress. Similarly, a strong majority of judges (79.16%, n = 38) perceived lifestyle diseases to be stressors. Table 4 provides a more granular analysis, including

SN	STRESSORS	PERCENTAGE (FREQUENCY)		
		VERY OFTEN	RARELY	NOT AT ALL
1	Frequent interruptions in children’s education because of transfers	54.16 (26)	27.08 (13)	18.75 (9)
2	The demise of parents and other relatives or ill-health of aged parents	40.00 (20)	44.00 (22)	16.00 (8)
3	Lifestyle diseases	37.50 (18)	41.66 (20)	20.83(10)

Table 4 Personal stress triggers in district judges.

the breakdown of responses across “very often”, “rarely”, and “not at all” categories, as well as the total number of responses for each item.

CONDITIONS OF SERVICE AS STRESSORS AMONG DISTRICT JUDGES

The High Courts exercise supervision and control over the district courts and other subordinate court judges. Key decisions with respect to their deployment (transfer), promotion, discipline and removal are made by the respective High Courts. This hierarchical regulation model is a serious impediment to the autonomy of the individual judges, and it can cause stress among judges.³⁸ Therefore, the judges were asked to identify conditions of service that could cause stress in them or their colleagues. The judges identify frequent (81.24%, n = 39) or premature transfers (77.54%, n = 38) and withholding of their promotions for unjustifiable reasons (70.83%, n = 33) to be causing stress either “very often” or “rarely”. Over 65% (n = 32) of judges noted that their performance evaluation mechanisms (Annual Confidential Reports [ACRs]) and non-consideration of their representations in relation to unjustifiable transfers (66.66%, n = 32) are also key stressors (Table 5).

SN	STRESSORS	PERCENTAGE (FREQUENCY)		
		VERY OFTEN	RARELY	NOT AT ALL
1	Frequent Transfers	54.16 (26)	27.08 (13)	18.75 (9)
2	Infrequent or premature transfer or arbitrary transfer	42.85 (21)	34.69 (17)	22.44 (11)
3	Withholding the elevation/ promotion for unknown or trivial reasons	45.83 (22)	25.00 (12)	29.16 (14)
4	Non-consideration of representation against inconvenient transfer in time or dismissing the representation without considering the circumstances	35.41 (17)	31.25 (15)	33.33 (16)
5	Concerns about ACR remarks	34.69 (17)	30.61 (15)	34.69 (17)

Table 5 Key service conditions causing stress among district judges.

PSYCHOLOGICAL/BEHAVIORAL STRESS SYMPTOMS AMONG DISTRICT JUDGES

The extant research underscores various psychological and physiological stress symptoms that may be found in judges as a result of occupational stress.³⁹ This study also, to a large extent, corroborates the literature by reporting some of the notable symptoms in judges. The key psychological stress symptoms that the judges attributed to judicial stress, by the combined percentage of “very often” and “rarely”

38 Shivaraj S. Huchhanavar, “Judicial Conduct Regulation Regimes in India and the United Kingdom: A Comparative Study” (PhD diss., Durham University, 2023), <https://etheses.dur.ac.uk/15082/>, accessed 19 August 2024.

39 See, for example, Schrever et al., *The Psychological Impact of Judicial Work*.

responses, are (a) memory impairment (76%; n = 36), (b) temper outbursts (70%, n = 35), (c) sleeplessness (70%, n = 35) and (d) feeling of lack of appreciation (68%; n = 34) (Table 6). Table 6 provides a more granular analysis, including the breakdown of responses across “very often”, “rarely”, and “not at all” categories, as well as the total number of responses for each item.

SN	STRESSORS	PERCENTAGE (FREQUENCY)		
		VERY OFTEN	RARELY	NOT AT ALL
1	Trouble remembering things	18 (9)	58 (27)	24 (12)
2	Temper outbursts that the judge could not control	22 (11)	48 (24)	30 (15)
3	Sleeplessness	30 (15)	40 (20)	30 (15)
4	Feeling that you are not being appreciated for your hard work	34 (17)	34 (17)	32 (16)

Table 6 Key psychological stress symptoms among district judges.

PHYSIOLOGICAL STRESS SYMPTOMS AMONG DISTRICT JUDGES

Notable physiological stress symptoms among judges are tiredness, digestive problems, headaches, back pain, physical tension and dizziness. Almost all participant judges (cumulative percentage 94%) felt “tiredness” as a key physiological symptom of stress among district judges. Most of the judges (94%; n = 47) felt that they suffer “digestive problems” either “very often” (40%; n = 20) or “rarely” (45%; n = 22), and 14.28% (n = 7) of judges do not suffer digestive problems as a result of occupational stress. A significant majority of judges (84.75%; n = 41) reported headaches to be a major health concern, as 41.66% (n = 20) judges indicated that they would suffer from this “very often” or “rarely” (43.75%; n = 21), with 14.28% (n = 7) not perceiving headaches as a stress manifestation.

Nearly 82% of participant judges perceived “back pain” to be strongly associated with occupational stress among judges. An equal percentage of judges (40.81%; n = 20) felt they either suffer from back pain “very often” or “rarely”. Notably, 18.36% (n = 9) did not perceive back pain to be associated with stress. Likewise, a strong majority of judges (77.54%; n = 38) felt that symptoms of “physical tension” could be seen in judges either “very often” (28.57%; n = 14) or “rarely” (46.97%; n = 24), and 22.44% (n = 11) felt judges would not show such a symptom. Similarly, the data reveals that over 80% (n = 38) of judges perceived dizziness as strongly associated with occupational stress whilst 27.65% of judges (n = 13) felt dizziness to be a common symptom, 53.19 (n = 23) felt that it is a rare symptom among judges, and 9.14% (or 9 judges) did not consider dizziness to be a symptom of stress.

SIGNIFICANT RELATIONSHIPS OBSERVED BETWEEN VARIABLES

As noted in the Methodology section, although the variables were spread across nine sections of the questionnaire, they were interrelated. Therefore, to measure the significant relationship between variables, we deployed the Chi-Square (X²) procedure (Table 7). The Chi-Square test shows a strong positive correlation

between “heavy workload” with other stressors. Judges who saw ‘heavy workload’ to be a stressor also strongly perceived the absence of control over the caseload to be a stressor (Table 7). The positive correlation of heavy workload as a stressor with other occupational stressors, such as the need for continued and extensive study, too much subordination, apprehension of frivolous complaints and too many administrative responsibilities, points to a plurality of occupational stress within the judiciary. It is also clear that the stressors strongly reinforce each other. Therefore, stress among the district judges is the culmination of various occupational factors. The study points out that workplace inadequacies, the lack of autonomy, and the threat of frivolous complaints are positively and strongly related to judicial stress; Table 7 further buttresses this claim.

SN	VARIABLES	X ² VALUE	N	P VALUE	PHI (Θ) VALUE
1	Heavy workload * Absence of control over the caseload	26.04	48 (27)	0.001	0.722
2	Heavy workload * Need continued and extensive study	29.71	48 (23)	0.001	0.771
3	Heavy workload * Personal/family problems of the judge	26.23	48 (26)	0.001	0.724
4	Heavy workload * Too much subordination or too much interference from the higher courts	51.40	49 (21)	0.001	1.010
5	Heavy workload * Apprehension of frivolous complaints to vigilance	52.05	49 (36)	0.001	1.020
6	Heavy workload * Bar antagonism, friction and increased boycotts	51.31	49 (31)	0.001	1.010
7	Heavy workload * Increased public expectation	50.50	49(24)	0.001	1.000
8	Heavy workload * Too many administrative and extrajudicial responsibilities	28.18	48(33)	0.001	0.751

LINEAR REGRESSION: KEY FINDINGS

For the first set of regression, we regress our dependent variables on the four key categories of occupational stressors (stress concerns at the judging stage, workplace limitations, personal stressors, and conditions of service) and the experience category (Table 8). The first model (Model-1) uses psychological factors as the dependent variable. We find that only service conditions emerge as statistically significant. In Model-2, we use physiological stress factors as the dependent variable. In this case, we find that it is instead the personal factors that emerge as statistically significant (Table 8). Interestingly, the experience category remains insignificant in both regressions, meaning that the length of judges’ tenure has no bearing on their stress perceptions.

We further explored various factors of service conditions. Among the nine items of service conditions, the concerns relating to Annual Confidential Reports (ACRs) emerged as the most significant (Table 9).

Finally, we carried out the same analysis for physiological factors for personal stressors (Table 10). We observe that there are only two significant concerns in this variable type: (i) lifestyle diseases and (ii) divorce or death of a spouse.

Table 7 The Chi-Square Test of Independence in relation to various stressors among district judges.

VARIABLES	(MODEL-1) PSYCHOLOGICAL	(MODEL-2) PHYSIOLOGICAL
Stress concerns at the judging stage	0.110 (0.147)	0.264 (0.261)
Workplace Limitations	-0.186 (0.135)	-0.248 (0.240)
Personal stress triggers	0.155 (0.116)	0.357* (0.206)
Service conditions	0.465*** (0.111)	0.319 (0.198)
Experience category	0.0402 (0.0485)	-0.0480 (0.0860)
Constant	0.177 (0.121)	0.605*** (0.215)
Observations (N)	45	45
R-squared	0.577	0.349

Table 8 Determinants of psychological and physiological stress. Standard errors in parentheses.
***p < 0.01, **p < 0.05, *p < 0.1.

The linear regression models found that different stressors distinctly affect psychological and physical well-being. Service conditions primarily impact psychological stress, while personal factors influence physiological stress. The ACR concerns, lifestyle diseases and personal loss emerge as the most perceived stressors among judges. Another notable finding of the regression analysis is that the experience (length of tenure of judges) has no bearing on the stress levels of judges.

V. DISCUSSION

Arguably, judges suffer occupational stress more than many other professionals.⁴⁰ 67% of salaried judges in England and Wales viewed stressful working conditions as one of the factors most likely to prompt them to leave the job.⁴¹ 59% of salaried judges in Scotland felt that the stressful working conditions would force them to leave the job early;⁴² similarly, 50% of salaried judges in Northern Ireland felt that way.⁴³

There are multiple causal factors of judicial stress. This study shows that heavy workload, the absence of control over one’s work, the sensitivity of the cases, poor

40 Feng-Jen Tsai and Chang-Chuan Chan, “Occupational Stress and Burnout of Judges and Procurators,” *International Archive of Occupational and Environmental Health* 83 (2010): 133-139; Schrever et al., *The Psychological Impact of Judicial Work*, 167.

41 Cheryl Thomas, *Judicial Attitude Survey: England and Wales 2022* (UCL Judicial Institute, 2023): 108.

42 Cheryl Thomas, *Judicial Attitude Survey: Scotland 2022* (UCL Judicial Institute, 2023): 58.

43 Cheryl Thomas, *Judicial Attitude Survey: Northern Ireland 2022* (UCL Judicial Institute, 2023): 54.

VARIABLES	PSYCHOLOGICAL FACTORS
Frequent transfers	-0.000928 (0.0956)
Arbitrary transfers	0.151 (0.141)
Non-considerations of representation	-0.0743 (0.0869)
Additional special court works	0.0739 (0.0585)
Withholding promotions	0.0257 (0.0681)
Allotment of uninteresting portfolios	0.0228 (0.0817)
ACR Concerns	0.128** (0.0558)
Non-cordial relations with admin judges	0.0971 (0.0633)
Less scope for higher studies	0.0499 (0.0710)
Constant	0.253*** (0.0864)
Observations	47
R-squared	0.546

VARIABLES	PHYSIOLOGICAL FACTORS
Frequent transfers affecting children's studies	0.00879 (0.114)
Demise of parents/relatives	0.0499 (0.116)
Lack of opportunities for spouse	0.0530 (0.117)
Divorce or death of spouse	0.152 (0.0982)
Lifestyle diseases	0.393*** (0.144)
Demanding family status	-0.303** (0.146)
Personal incompetencies	0.180 (0.121)
Constant	0.418** (0.168)
Observations (N)	45
R-squared	0.403

Table 9 Service conditions as stressors.
Standard errors in parentheses.
***p < 0.01, **p < 0.05,
*p < 0.1.

Table 10 Personal stress triggers in district judges.
Standard errors in parentheses.
***p < 0.01, **p < 0.05,
*p < 0.1.

interpersonal relationships with court staff and lawyers, fear of false complaints and excessive subordination are notable stressors among district judges. These findings corroborate the literature on occupational stress.⁴⁴ A study carried out by the UNODC (2022) reported that most judicial officers perceive heavy workload (80%), lack of resources (65%), institutional structures and systems (62%), institutional culture (54%), media pressure (51%) and career development issues (50%) as notable stressors among judges.⁴⁵ Besides, the study also notes a significant percentage of judges perceive that the physical work environment (48%), the relationship with [court] management (44%), the relationship with co-workers and staff (38%), external pressures (35%) and missing purpose in work (32%) as factors causing stress in judges.⁴⁶ Another notable study has also reported that heavy workload, weak administrative support, negative public opinion about the judiciary and high public expectations as major stressors in judges.⁴⁷ An Australian psychological survey of judges, judicial officers, and magistrates found that 1/3rd of them were suffering from psychological distress of moderate to severe level.⁴⁸ Therefore, this study demonstrates that [district] judges in India also perceive occupational stress from various sources.

The causes/sources of judicial stress, as perceived by the participant district judges, can be broadly categorized into three groups. First, stressors relating to or affecting the competence of judges; second, stressors relating to or affecting the autonomy of judges;⁴⁹ and third, stressors relating to the regulation of judges.⁵⁰ These are not mutually exclusive categories of stressors; there is a varying degree of overlap between them.

⁴⁴ See, for example, Richard S. Lazarus and Susan Folkman, *Stress, Appraisal and Coping* (Springer, 1984).

⁴⁵ UNODC, *Judicial Well-being Report* 2022, 13.

⁴⁶ UNODC, *Judicial Well-being Report* 2022, 13.

⁴⁷ Justice Helen Bowskill, "Cumulative Trauma and Stress as a Judicial Officer," (2021), <https://archive.sclqld.org.au/judgepub/2021/bowskill20210325.pdf>; Stuart Lusting, et al., "Inside the Judges' Chambers: Narrative Responses from the National Association of Immigration Judges Stress and Burnout Survey," *Georgetown Immigration Law Journal* 23 no. 57 (2008): 57–83.

⁴⁸ Carly Schrever, "Wellbeing Survey Of Australia's Judiciary Reveals Risk Of Distress And Burnout," *Pursuit* (May 2019) <https://pursuit.unimelb.edu.au/articles/wellbeing-survey-of-australia-s-judiciary-reveals-risk-of-distress-and-burnout>.

⁴⁹ The Basic Psychological Needs Theory presupposes that 'the satisfaction of the psychological needs for autonomy, competence, and relatedness is said to represent essential nutrients for growth'. It defines autonomy as a sense of volition and psychological freedom, competence as a sense of effectiveness and mastery, and 'relatedness' as a sense of intimacy and connection with important others. However, within the context of the findings of this study, 'judicial regulation' seems to be an appropriate theme that could encompass various systemic issues that judges perceive as stressors; therefore, we have replaced relatedness with 'judicial regulation' as a category of classification. For a definition of autonomy and competence, see the Basic Psychological Need Satisfaction and Frustration Scale (BPNSFS) <https://selfdeterminationtheory.org/basic-psychological-need-satisfaction-and-frustration-scale/>.

⁵⁰ "Judicial regulation is a dynamic exercise carried out through formal or informal mechanisms with an aim to alter, amend, abet and sanction behaviours or competencies of judicial personnel that are inconsistent with institutional or professional standards or legitimate public expectations. It also aims to promote, augment and incentivise behaviours or competencies of judicial personnel that are consistent with institutional or professional standards, producing defined or desired outcomes." Shivaraj S Huchhanavar, "Conceptualising Judicial Independence and Accountability from a Regulatory Perspective," *Oslo Law Review* 9, no.2 (2023) <https://www.idunn.no/doi/10.18261/olr.9.2.3>.

The competence-related stressors include the need for continued and extensive study, handling sensitive, technical and complicated cases, difficulty in executing judicial orders, managing cases lacking sufficient evidence and addressing issues involving legal and moral perspectives. Stressors such as the demise of parents, lifestyle diseases, frequent interruptions in children's education and other personal or family problems of the judge could be added to this category.

The autonomy-related stressors include the lack of control over the workload and the people appearing before the judge. The excessive need to control one's environment, too much subordination or too much interference from the higher courts and increased public expectations would broadly fit into this category.

The apprehension of frivolous complaints, heavy workload, too many non-judicial responsibilities, and Bar antagonism are regulation-related stressors perceived by the judges. Likewise, workplace limitations causing stress, such as inadequate staff, the lack of ICT infrastructure, unfurnished courtrooms, unmanageable staff, and concerns relating to judicial promotions and performance assessments, are also key regulation-related stressors. However, as noted already, these are not mutually exclusive categories; for example, too much interference from senior judges could also be considered a regulation-related stressor. Conversely, a heavy workload could also be seen as a competence-related stressor, as it would affect the performance of judges.⁵¹

As noted in the results section, the perceived physiological stress symptoms among judges are tiredness, digestive problems, headaches, back pain, physical tension and dizziness. Similarly, the study reported memory impairment, temper outbursts, sleeplessness and feelings of lack of appreciation as some of the psychological stressors. Although a good number of judges perceive these symptoms to be related to stress (Tables 7), they did not meet the Chi-Square threshold or statistical significance in the regression analysis. However, studies have reported similar stress symptoms in other jurisdictions. For example, judges in the state of Louisiana have also reported some of the physiological and psychological symptoms akin to what was perceived by judges in India.⁵² Therefore, the psychological and physiological stress symptoms, although not meeting the Chi-Square test threshold or the statistical significance in the regression analysis, cannot be ignored. The symptoms such as trouble remembering, physical exhaustion, irritability, job dissatisfaction, depressed mood, panic attacks, loss of sleep and appetite, and dizziness have to be taken seriously to ensure the well-being of the subordinate court judges, as they relate to or emanate from the job that they do. According to the UNODC study, most judges report that their judicial work contributes to physical exhaustion (75% of the survey participants), emotional exhaustion (72%), anxiety (63%) and sadness (54%).⁵³ The respondents in the same study reported that the lack of judicial well-being among judges inhibits the

51 Stuart Lusting, et al., "Inside the Judges' Chambers: Narrative Responses From the National Association of Immigration Judges Stress and Burnout Survey," *Georgetown Immigration Law Journal* 23 no. 57 (2008): 57–83.

52 Simone Marstiller, "An Ounce of Prevention: Knowing the Causes and Signs of Judicial Stress and Getting Help Before Impairment Leads to Ethics Complaints," *Counterbalance* 31, no. 8 (2015), <https://louisianajlap.com/wp-content/uploads/2015/04/judgesannounceofprevention.pdf>, accessed 16 January 2024; Jared Chamberlain and Monica K. Miller, "Stress in the Courtroom: Call for Research," *Psychiatry Psychology and Law* 237 (2008): 240–243; Jared Chamberlain and Monica K. Miller, *Evidence of Secondary Traumatic Stress*, -7214, 218–21.

53 UNODC, *Judicial Well-being Report* 2022, 15.

efficiency of justice (80%), quality of judicial determinations (68%), access to justice (40%), integrity of judges and the judiciary (35%) and procedural fairness (31%).⁵⁴ Considering the significance of judicial well-being for the overall efficiency of the judicial administration, there is a need for extensive research in India.

The perception-based correlational analysis shows that stress is not positively correlated with the tenure of the judges. Extant literature offers somewhat contrasting evidence. For instance, Jaffe et al. reported that more experienced judges reported higher levels of vicarious trauma and externalizing-hostility symptoms.⁵⁵ Some other studies find that more senior judges are less satisfied with their job.⁵⁶ The UNODC also reports that judges under 40 years of age [meaning those who have spent fewer years as a judge] appeared to have fewer stress concerns than judges over 40 years of age.⁵⁷ Similarly, Muchemi and Kiumi report that judicial officers in the 46–50 years age range are more likely to suffer from dissociative reactions from thoughts or memories of traumatizing court cases, while the age group 51–55 years manage secondary traumatic stress well.⁵⁸ In light of these differing observations, there is a need for further research: an empirical study covering judges belonging to different age groups, hierarchies, and seniority would shed more light on the correlation between the tenure of judges and judicial stress.

VI. CONCLUSION

The paper presents the key findings of a perception-based exploratory study of occupational stress among India's district judges. The paper finds that district judges perceive occupational stress from various sources. Occupational challenges such as heavy workload, lack of control over their work, frequent transfers, inadequate infrastructure, non-cooperative court staff and lawyers, faulty performance assessment mechanisms and unhealthy working conditions are the key stressors among district judges. The stress concerns, such as too much subordination or interference by higher courts, apprehension of frivolous complaints to vigilance, and too many administrative and extrajudicial responsibilities, speak to the lack of effective regulatory and support mechanisms within the judiciary. At a personal level, as the paper reports, the district judges perceive poor memory, difficulty in concentration and tiredness as some of their stress symptoms. These findings call for an in-depth study of judicial stress across judicial hierarchies in India. Informed by the findings of such a study, there should be policy interventions to alleviate the stress concerns of judges. A robust legal system needs healthy, competent and independent judges; as this study indicates, stressful working conditions and the lack of support severely undercut judges' health and well-being.

⁵⁴ UNODC, *Judicial Well-being Report 2022*, 22.

⁵⁵ Peter G. Jaffe, et al., "Vicarious Trauma in Judges: The Personal Challenge of Dispensing Justice," *Juvenile and Family Court Journal* 54 (2003): 1–9, <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1755-6988.2003.tb00083.x>.

⁵⁶ Sharyn R. Anleu and Kathy Mack, "Job satisfaction in the judiciary," *Work, Employment and Society* 28 no. 5 (2014): 685.

⁵⁷ UNODC, *Judicial Well-being Report 2022*, 15.

⁵⁸ Peter Muchemi and John Kanjogu Kiumi, "Age Differences in Secondary Traumatic Stress Levels among Judges and Magistrates in Rift Valley Region, Kenya." *Research on Humanities and Social Sciences* 7 (2017): 68–78.

LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

The study uses fairly representative data since participants (district and sessions court judges) were drawn from most parts of the country; however, a larger sample size would have enhanced the generalizability of the findings. The stratified data (participants from higher judiciary such as high courts and the Supreme Court) would have allowed the researchers to make a comparative analysis. Furthermore, the study could not standardize and validate psychometric instruments for measuring different occupational stress among judges since it is difficult to manage the consent of Indian judges to participate in such clinical studies.⁵⁹ Notwithstanding these limitations, this perception-based exploratory study will be a good reference point for future research on judicial stress in India.

IMPLICATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The research findings will have relevance for evidence-based policy interventions to enhance the health, well-being and performance of judges. This perception-based initial assessment of judicial stress encourages further research in the field.

ETHICS AND CONSENT

National Seminar for Principal District and Sessions Judges on Stress Management, Programme No. 1049, 22–24 September 2017, and the Annual Conference on Stress Management, Programme No. 1021, 15–16 April 2016, were approved by the National Judicial Academic Council. The data was collected as a part of these stress management seminars after obtaining consent from the participating judges; the participants were also informed of their right to confidentiality, anonymity and withdrawal. They were also informed that the data would be used for academic purposes, including publications in the form of research articles. However, as there is no formal ethical approval procedure at the National Judicial Academy India, the study was not separately vetted for research ethics compliance.

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COMPETING INTERESTS

The authors have no competing interests to declare.

AUTHOR AFFILIATIONS

Dr Shivaraj Huchhanavar  orcid.org/0000-0001-6701-1677

PhD in Law, Associate Professor, Jindal Global Law School, OP Jindal Global University, Sonapat, Haryana, India

⁵⁹ Other methodological limitations and constraints are already noted in Section III.

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