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Beyond the Bench: Exploring the Mental health and Relational Consequences of Occupational Stress among Judicial Officers

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Abstract

The judicial profession is inherently high-stress due to its demands for impartial decision-making, long working hours, exposure to emotionally challenging cases, and public scrutiny. This study examines the mental health consequences of occupational stress on the mental health, family functioning, and interpersonal well-being of judicial officers. Drawing on both international and indigenous research, including studies from Taiwan, Canada, South Africa, the United States, and Pakistan, the study identifies key stressors such as excessive workload, role conflict, emotional labor, and lack of institutional support. Chronic occupational stress contributes to emotional exhaustion, burnout, reduced relational satisfaction, social withdrawal, and impaired coping, leading to strained family and interpersonal relationships. The study employs a qualitative research design with purposive sampling, conducting semi-structured interviews with 8 judicial officers aged 45–65. Thematic analysis is used to identify recurring patterns related to stress experiences, coping strategies, and work–family dynamics. Findings highlight the bidirectional relationship between occupational stress and family/social functioning, demonstrating that stress not only originates from professional responsibilities but also affects personal life and relationships. The study underscores the importance of organizational interventions, social support, and coping strategies in mitigating the adverse effects of occupational stress. These insights provide valuable implications for policy development, judicial well-being initiatives, and mental health support tailored to high-responsibility legal professions.

Keywords: *judicial officers, occupational stress, family relationships, interpersonal relationships well-being, burnout, coping strategies*

Introduction

Stress is a physiological and psychological response to internal or external demands that are perceived as challenging, threatening, or exceeding an individual's coping abilities. It activates the body's fight-or-flight mechanism, triggering a cascade of hormonal, emotional, and behavioral changes designed to enhance survival (Schneiderman et al., 2023). Stress can be emotional (mental tension), physical (muscle tightness or fatigue), or behavior (avoidance, aggression, or poor habits). It differs from person to person depending on genetics, environment, coping skills, and life experiences (Shahid et al., 2025; Schneiderman et al., 2005).

Unmanaged stress harms both body and mind, reducing quality of life, increasing disease risk, and causing anxiety, depression, cognitive decline, and burnout, especially in high-pressure jobs (Lazarus, 1984). For judicial officers, the mental health consequences is intensified due to the high-stakes nature of legal decisions. The constant pressure can result in emotional detachment, increasing the risk of mental health deterioration. Furthermore, stress often leads to social isolation, diminishing support networks that are essential for healthy coping. Job-related stress spills over into personal life, creating poor work-life balance. Individuals under chronic occupational stress often lack the time, energy, or motivation to engage in hobbies, social activities, or self-care. Over time, this leads to reduced personal satisfaction, emotional burnout, and a diminished sense of joy outside of work (Greenhaus & Allen, 2022). This imbalance is especially critical in high-responsibility roles such as judges and lawyers.

Occupational stress

Occupational stress refers to the harmful physical and emotional responses that occur when job requirements do not match the worker's capabilities, resources, or needs. Among judicial officers, stress arises from intense workloads, the need for quick but fair decisions, and the high emotional toll of hearing cases involving crime, trauma, and injustice. Unlike many professions, judges must maintain impartiality and emotional control under pressure, often leading to emotional suppression and burnout (Shah et al., 2022). It typically arises in environments with high workloads, tight deadlines, ambiguity in roles, or lack of support.

Factors of Occupational stress

Judicial officers play a pivotal role in upholding justice, yet their profession is fraught with intense psychological and emotional demands. The constant pressure to remain impartial, deliver timely decisions, and manage emotionally charged cases exposes them to high levels of occupational stress. Unlike other professionals, judicial officers often work in environments where support systems are minimal, and expectations are extraordinarily high. This prolonged exposure to stressors not only affects their well-being but also undermines their job performance and decision-making abilities (Rogers et al., 1991).

Below are key factors contributing to this stress, each posing unique challenges to their mental health and professional efficacy.

Workload and Deadlines

Judicial officers face overwhelming caseloads due to delays in judicial processes, staff shortages, and procedural backlogs. The pressure to dispose of cases swiftly, while ensuring fairness and legality, leads to mental fatigue and decision fatigue. Working long hours to meet unrealistic deadlines exacerbates stress, impacting their concentration, efficiency, and overall mental health (Shah et al., 2025).

Lack of Support

Judicial officers frequently operate in professional isolation, with limited access to psychological support or peer discussion opportunities. The solitary nature of their decision-making responsibilities and the absence of structured emotional or institutional support systems increase the risk of burnout, anxiety, and other stress-related disorders. This lack of support also diminishes their capacity to cope with daily occupational challenges (Shahid et al., 2025).

Public Expectations and Accountability

Judges are expected to remain neutral and error-free, leading to constant performance pressure. Public scrutiny, media coverage, and fear of reputational damage intensify the psychological burden. These expectations foster an environment where any mistake, real or perceived, can lead to harsh criticism, creating anxiety and reducing intrinsic motivation and job satisfaction (Fine & Marsh, 2024). Judges are burdened by society's unrealistic expectations of infallibility, emotional restraint, and ethical perfection may lead to interpersonal relationships issues and heightened psychological stress.

Personal Safety and Security

Judges often deal with cases involving organized crime, political corruption, or high-profile individuals, which can lead to threats to their safety and that of their families. Living under constant fear of retaliation induces chronic stress, heightens vigilance, and interferes with their peace of mind, thereby affecting their mental health and sense of security (Casaleiro et al., 2021).

Family and Interpersonal Relationships

Family and interpersonal relationships refer to the close, supportive, and interactive bonds individuals form with family members, friends, colleagues, and the broader community. These relationships serve as fundamental sources of emotional, psychological, and practical support across the lifespan. Family relationships typically include parental, spousal, sibling, and extended kin connections, while interpersonal relationships encompass friendships, workplace interactions, and community engagement. Healthy family and interpersonal relationships ties promote well-being, reduce stress, and provide a sense of belonging and identity. Conversely, strained or absent relationships can contribute to mental health issues, loneliness, and decreased life satisfaction (Umberson & Donnelly, 2023).

Increased Risk of Adverse Mental Health Consequences

Judicial officers often experience prolonged emotional suppression, exposure to traumatic cases, and relentless workload pressures, all of which increase vulnerability to clinical depression and emotional burnout. Burnout manifests as deep emotional exhaustion, detachment from professional roles, and a declining sense of personal accomplishment. Over time, the inability to decompress emotionally outside work exacerbates depressive symptoms, leading to chronic sadness, low energy, and impaired judgment (Shahid et al., 2026).

Reduced Relational Satisfaction and Higher Chances of Marital Conflict

Work-related stress frequently spills over into personal relationships, diminishing emotional availability, communication quality, and mutual understanding within marriages and partnerships. Judicial officers may find it difficult to balance work responsibilities with family roles, causing frustration and unmet expectations at home. This imbalance fosters resentment, emotional distance, and recurrent conflicts, ultimately threatening marital satisfaction and stability (Kossek et al., 2023).

Social withdrawal and Erosion of Support Networks

Due to the judiciary's ethical standards and fear of perceived bias, judicial officers often limit their social circle, reducing opportunities for emotional support. Over time, this self-imposed isolation weakens friendships, community ties, and informal support networks that are crucial for mental resilience. The lack of external validation and safe spaces to share vulnerabilities deepens loneliness and diminishes their coping resources (Pangelinan, 2025).

Mental health Consequences of Occupational stress on Family and Interpersonal Relationships

Occupational stress can have a profound impact on an individual's personal life,

affecting their relationships with family and friends. Research has shown that high levels of occupational stress can lead to increased conflict, decreased emotional availability, and strained relationships. According to Bakker and Demerouti (2018), job demands-resources theory suggests that occupational stress can lead to burnout and decreased well-being, affecting family and interpersonal relationships.

Organizations can play a critical role in promoting employee well-being and reducing occupational stress. By providing resources and support, organizations can help employees manage occupational stress and promote healthy relationships. Latest research findings suggest that occupational stress can have a lasting impact on family and interpersonal relationships, emphasizing the need for proactive measures to mitigate its effects (Hagger & Hamilton, 2021).

Relationship Between Occupational Stress and Family Interpersonal Relationships

The relationship between occupational stress and family interpersonal relationships is complex and bidirectional. Research has shown that occupational stress can lead to work-family conflict, where work-related demands interfere with family responsibilities (Yuan et al., 2023). Furthermore, social support from family and friends can play a moderating role in the relationship between occupational stress and family interpersonal relationships (Fradelos et al., 2014; Shahid et al., 2025).

Transactional Model of Stress and Coping (Lazarus, 1984)

The transactional model of stress and coping posits that stress arises from the interaction between individuals and their environment. According to this model, stress occurs when individuals appraise a situation as threatening, challenging, or exceeding their coping abilities. The model emphasizes the role of cognitive appraisal and coping strategies in managing stress. There are two types of cognitive appraisal: primary appraisal (evaluating the significance of the situation) and secondary appraisal (evaluating one's ability to cope with the situation). Effective coping strategies can mitigate the negative impact of stress.

Job Demands-Resources Model (Demerouti & Bakker, 2017).

The job demands-resources model suggests that occupational stress occurs when job demands exceed available resources. Job demands refer to physical, psychological, interpersonal relationships, or organizational aspects of the job that require sustained effort. Job resources, on the other hand, refer to physical, psychological, interpersonal relationships, or organizational aspects of the job that help achieve work goals and reduce job demands. When job demands outweigh job resources, employees experience burnout and decreased well-being. This model highlights the importance of providing employees with adequate resources to manage job demands.

Literature Review

Tsai and Chan (2009) conducted a quantitative study in Taiwan to examine occupational stress and burnout among judicial officers. The sample comprised 211 participants, including judges and public prosecutors, and data were collected using standardized instruments such as the Job Content Questionnaire, the Effort Reward Imbalance scale, and the Copenhagen Burnout Inventory. The findings revealed that high psychological job demands, excessive workload, and low workplace social support

significantly predicted burnout. Furthermore, reduced social support at work was strongly associated with emotional exhaustion, which indirectly affected judges' personal and interpersonal relationships outside the workplace, demonstrating a spillover effect of occupational stress into social functioning (Tsai & Chan, 2009).

Rogers et al. (1991) explored occupational stress among Canadian judges using a mixed-method research design. The study included 104 judges and additionally collected data from 48 spouses, offering valuable insight into family dynamics. The results indicated that key stressors included decision-making responsibility, exposure to emotionally disturbing cases, and persistent time pressure.

Hagen and Bogaerts (2014) examined the relationship between occupational stress, social support, job satisfaction, and burnout among 257 Dutch judges using a cross-sectional research design. The findings indicated that high job pressure significantly increased burnout, whereas social support and job satisfaction reduced its severity. Judges who reported stronger social support systems demonstrated better emotional regulation and healthier interpersonal relationships, suggesting that effective workplace stress management positively influences interpersonal relationships and family well-being (Hagen & Bogaerts, 2014; Rothmann & Rossouw, 2020).

Indigenous Researches

A Previous study examined occupational stress and psychological well-being among judicial officers in Pakistan using a quantitative design. The sample consisted of 150 judges from district and sessions courts across Punjab. Standardized stress and well-being scales were used to assess workload, role conflict, and emotional exhaustion. The findings revealed that heavy caseloads and prolonged working hours significantly increased stress levels, which negatively affected judges' interpersonal relationships interactions and family relationships. Many participants reported reduced family time and emotional detachment, indicating a spillover of occupational stress into interpersonal relationships life (Muhammad et al., 2021).

Ali and Batool (2016) conducted a study on occupational stress and work family conflict among judges and senior lawyers working within Pakistan's judicial system. The sample included 120 judicial officers and legal professionals from Lahore and Islamabad. Using self-report questionnaires, the study found that high job demands and emotional involvement in cases were significantly associated with work family conflict. Judges experiencing higher stress levels reported strained marital relationships and reduced interpersonal relationships participation, highlighting the adverse impact of judicial stress on family and interpersonal relationships well-being (Ali & Batool, 2016). Judges reported emotional exhaustion and social isolation, often distancing themselves from family and friends to cope with stress, which negatively affected their interpersonal relationships (GHANI, 2025).

Rationale

The judicial profession, characterized by high-stakes decision-making, long working hours, and immense responsibility, is inherently stressful (Bakker & Demerouti, 2017). In Pakistan, where the judiciary plays a critical role in upholding the rule of law and ensuring justice, the impact of occupational stress on judicial officers' mental health, well-being, and family life is a significant concern (Imran et al., 2025). Chronic stress can compromise

cognitive function, impair emotional regulation, and strain personal relationships, ultimately affecting the quality of justice dispensed (Hagger & Hamilton, 2021). This study aims to explore the effects of occupational stress on Pakistani judicial officers, drawing on both international research and indigenous studies, to inform evidence-based interventions and support the well-being of these critical stakeholders in the justice system.

Research Questions

1. What are the primary sources of occupational stress for judicial officers, and how do they impact mental health outcomes?
2. How does occupational stress affect judicial officers' family relationships, including marital satisfaction and parent-child relationships?
3. What coping strategies do judicial officers use to manage occupational stress, and which ones are most effective?
4. How does the judiciary's work environment, including workload and support systems, contribute to occupational stress among judicial officers?
5. How do judicial officers perceive the impact of occupational stress on their well-being and professional functioning?

Interviews Questions

1. Can you describe a particularly stressful experience you've had in your role as a judicial officer, and how you managed it?
2. How do you balance your work and family responsibilities, and what challenges do you face in maintaining this balance?
3. What support systems do you have in order to help you cope with occupational stress, and how effective are they?
4. Have you experienced any negative effects on your mental or physical health due to occupational stress, and if so, how have you addressed them?
5. How do you think the judiciary's work environment could be improved to reduce occupational stress among judicial officers?

Methodology

Research Design

The study employed qualitative research design and utilized in-depth interviews to gather rich, contextual data on judicial officers' experiences with occupational stress and its impact on their personal and professional lives. The qualitative approach allowed for an in-depth exploration of the complexities and nuances of occupational stress and enabled the researcher to gain a deeper understanding of how judicial officers experienced and coped with stress.

Sampling Strategy

A purposive sampling strategy was used to select participants for this study. This strategy involved selecting participants who were knowledgeable about the research topic and were able to provide valuable insights. Judicial officers from various courts and jurisdictions were approached to participate in the study.

Sample

The sample consisted of 8 judicial officers aged between 45–65 years from different courts and jurisdictions. The sample size was determined based on the principle of saturation, and data collection continued until no new themes or patterns emerged.

Inclusion Criteria

The inclusion criteria for this study were:

- Judicial officers who had been serving in their current role for at least 2 years
- Judicial officers who were willing to participate in interviews

Exclusion Criteria

The exclusion criteria for this study were:

- Judicial officers who were on leave or sabbatical during the data collection period
- Judicial officers who were not willing to participate in interviews
- Judicial officers who did not meet the inclusion criteria

Procedure

An interview protocol consisting of open-ended questions was used to guide the discussion and encourage participants to describe their lived experiences. Questions explored stressful professional situations, perceived challenges within the judicial environment, and suggestions for improving workplace conditions to reduce stress. These open-ended inquiries enabled participants to share their perspectives freely and in detail. All interviews were conducted in a confidential and supportive setting to promote honest communication. With participants' consent, the interviews were audio-recorded and later transcribed verbatim. The researcher also documented nonverbal cues, emotional expressions, and contextual observations to enrich the data. Interviews were conducted until data saturation was reached, meaning that no new themes or significant information were emerging.

Based on their responses and willingness to participate further, a subset of participants was purposively selected for in-depth interviews. These interviews provided detailed and contextual information regarding their professional experiences and the personal impact of occupational stress. After the interviews were completed, the interview responses were organized for descriptive examination, while the interview transcripts were analyzed using thematic analysis to identify recurring patterns, meanings, and themes related to the mental health consequences of occupational stress.

Ethical Considerations

The study adhered to strict ethical standards throughout the research process. Informed consent was obtained from all participants prior to data collection, and they were fully informed about the purpose and procedures of the study. Participation was entirely voluntary, and participants were informed of their right to withdraw from the study at any time without any consequences. Confidentiality and anonymity were maintained by securely storing all collected data and protecting participants' identities and responses. Cultural norms and values in both the United States and Pakistan were respected to ensure that participants felt safe, comfortable, and valued throughout the research process. Inclusivity was promoted by treating individuals from diverse backgrounds with equal respect and fairness.

Additionally, all necessary measures were taken to minimize potential harm and safeguard the well-being of participants during the study.

Data Analysis

The collected qualitative data were analyzed using thematic analysis. The following steps were followed:

1. Familiarization with the data
2. Coding of responses
3. Identification of themes
4. Theme Naming

Results

This chapter presents the findings derived from 8 in-depth semi-structured interviews conducted with judicial officers. The purpose of this study was to explore the psychological impact of occupational stress on interpersonal relationships among judicial officers. Using Braun and Clarke's thematic analysis framework, data were coded, categorized, and organized into superordinate and subordinate themes. Analysis revealed five major superordinate themes, including Occupational Stressors in Judicial Work, Psychological and Physical Impact of Occupational Stress, Impact on Interpersonal Relationships and Family Relationships, Coping Mechanisms and Protective Factors, and Institutional Gaps.

Participant 1

Table 1: *Verbatim Quotes and Emergent Themes – Participant 1*

Verbatim Quote	Code	Emergent Theme
Presiding over a high-profile corruption case under intense media scrutiny created immense psychological strain. I constantly felt that any small error could damage public trust in the judiciary.	Media scrutiny, Fear of error, public accountability pressure, Moral burden	Occupational stress due to public exposure
There were nights when I could not sleep because I kept replaying the proceedings in my mind, questioning whether I had over-looked anything.	Rumination, Insomnia, Self-doubt, Cognitive over-engagement	Psychological distress and anxiety
The responsibility was not just legal but societal. I felt personally accountable for how my judgment would be perceived.	Role internalization, Emotional burden, Performance pressure.	Emotional weight of judicial responsibility
Even during family meals, I was mentally absent, thinking about legal precedents and evidence.	Mental preoccupation, Emotional withdrawal, Work spillover	Work-family conflict
My spouse sometimes noticed that I was physically present but emotionally unavailable.	Emotional disengagement, Reduced intimacy, Relational distance	Impact on marital relationship
Peer discussions with senior colleagues reassured me and reduced feelings of isolation.	Collegial validation, Shared stress, Emotional normalization	Professional support system

Meditation and structured daily planning helped me regain control over my stress levels.	Mindfulness practice, Time management, Self-regulation	Adaptive coping strategies
I realized that without deliberate boundaries, work would consume my personal identity.	Role engulfment, Boundary difficulty, Identity strain	Psychological spillover into personal life

Participant 2:

Table 2: Verbatim Quotes and Emergent Themes – Participant 2

Verbatim Quote	Code	Emergent Theme
Listening to traumatic testimonies from children in a domestic violence case stayed with me long after court hours.	Secondary trauma, Emotional absorption, Residual stress	Emotional strain from sensitive cases
I started experiencing frequent headaches and disturbed sleep during that trial.	Somatic symptoms, Sleep disturbance, Stress manifestation	Physical health consequences
There were days when I felt emotionally drained even before the hearings began.	Emotional exhaustion, Anticipatory stress, Burnout symptoms	Chronic psychological fatigue
I had to cancel family gatherings multiple times due to urgent hearings.	Missed milestones, Role conflict, Guilt	Family relationship strain
My children sometimes complained that I was always busy.	Perceived neglect, Reduced parental presence, Emotional distance	Parental relational impact
Emotional fatigue made me irritable at home, even when I did not intend to be.	Irritability, Emotional spillover, Reduced patience	Spillover effect of occupational stress
Journaling my feelings helped me process the emotional intensity.	Emotional expression, Reflective coping, Self-processing	Emotional coping strategy
Although workshops are available, there is hesitation among officers to seek counseling due to stigma.	Mental health stigma, Underutilization of services, Cultural barrier	Institutional and cultural limitation
Physical exercise and short walks during recess helped release tension.	Active coping, Stress release, Behavioral regulation	Self-care mechanisms

Participant 3:

Table 3: Verbatim Quotes and Emergent Themes – Participant 3

Verbatim Quote	Code	Emergent Theme
The corruption case was highly publicized, and media attention added constant pressure to every decision I made.	Media pressure, Public evaluation anxiety, Performance stress	External occupational stressor
I felt anxious about potential backlash regardless of the outcome.	Anticipatory anxiety, Fear of criticism, Decision stress	Psychological burden of judgment

Sleep disturbances and difficulty concentrating became frequent.	Cognitive impairment, Fatigue, Stress symptoms	Psychological health impact
Missing family gatherings due to urgent hearings created emotional strain at home.	Work intrusion, Relational dissatisfaction, Guilt	Work-life imbalance
My spouse and I had to openly discuss expectations to prevent misunderstandings.	Communication adjustment, Relational negotiation	Adaptive relational coping
At times, I felt emotionally detached after dealing with intense cases.	Emotional numbness, Defensive coping, Compassion fatigue	Emotional regulation difficulty
Exercise and meditation were crucial in maintaining resilience.	Self-care, Health prioritization, Emotional stability	Personal coping strategy
Institutional mental health support exists but participation is minimal.	Stigma, Limited engagement, Organizational gap	Institutional deficiency
I often felt isolated because judicial decisions must ultimately be made alone.	Professional isolation, Sole responsibility, Emotional loneliness	Occupational isolation

Participant 4

Table 4: Verbatim Quotes and Emergent Themes – Participant 4

Verbatim Quote	Code	Emergent Theme
Handling an organized crime case with political implications created constant psychological pressure because I knew any decision could attract criticism.	Political pressure, Fear of backlash, High-stakes accountability	Decision-making stress
I experienced sleepless nights and persistent mental tension throughout the trial.	Insomnia, Chronic stress, Cognitive strain	Psychological distress
I found myself ruminating about potential legal consequences even after returning home.	Rumination, Work intrusion, Mental preoccupation	Work-to-home spillover
My spouse expressed frustration that I was unavailable during important family moments.	Marital dissatisfaction, Emotional absence, Relational tension	Impact on marital relationship
Frequent headaches and elevated blood pressure emerged during prolonged hearings.	Somatic symptoms, Stress-related hypertension	Physical health consequences
Breaking tasks into smaller parts helped me regain a sense of control.	Task segmentation, Structured planning, Problem-focused coping	Adaptive coping strategy
There is minimal formal mental health support in our system.	Institutional neglect, Lack of structured support	Organizational gap
Flexible scheduling and administrative support would reduce chronic stress.	Policy reform need, Workload redistribution	Institutional recommendation

Participant 5

Table 5: Verbatim Quotes and Emergent Themes – Participant 5

Verbatim Quote	Code	Emergent Theme
Deciding a custody case involving minors created emotional conflict because I was aware my judgment would permanently affect children's lives.	Moral dilemma, Emotional burden, Ethical strain	Emotional responsibility in family cases
I felt mentally drained and physically exhausted after extended hearings.	Emotional fatigue, Physical exhaustion, Burnout symptoms	Chronic stress manifestation
Sleep deprivation and tension headaches became frequent during that period.	Sleep disturbance, Somatic stress	Physical impact of occupational stress
Missing school events and anniversaries created guilt and tension at home.	Guilt, Work-family conflict, Relational strain	Family relationship impact
My family provided emotional comfort and allowed me to decompress.	Emotional validation, Safe space, Protective support	Family as coping resource
I practiced cognitive reframing to remind myself that I must uphold the law objectively.	Cognitive restructuring, Professional detachment	Psychological coping mechanism
Counseling services are available but rarely utilized due to stigma.	Mental health stigma, Underuse of services	Cultural barrier within judiciary
Digital case tracking could significantly reduce administrative overload.	Technological reform, Work efficiency	Structural intervention need

Participant 6

Table 6: Verbatim Quotes and Emergent Themes – Participant 6

Verbatim Quote	Code	Emergent Theme
Reviewing complex forensic evidence for months was intellectually exhausting and mentally overwhelming.	Cognitive overload, Sustained concentration fatigue	Intellectual strain
I sometimes felt loss of motivation and mild depressive symptoms during prolonged trials.	Low mood, Emotional depletion, Burnout indicators	Mental health impact
Irregular meals and prolonged sitting led to weight gain and back pain.	Sedentary lifestyle, Physical decline	Occupational health consequence
Emotional exhaustion reduced my patience with my family.	Irritability, Reduced tolerance, Emotional spillover	Interpersonal relationships relationship impact

Peer discussions were more effective than family support for professional stress.	Professional validation, Shared understanding	Peer-based coping
Gardening and reading helped me mentally detach from court pressures.	Leisure coping, Emotional detachment	Personal resilience strategy
Rotational assignments would prevent long-term overload.	Workload distribution, Preventive strategy	Organizational reform need
There is a culture of endurance rather than emotional expression in judiciary.	Emotional suppression, Professional stoicism	Cultural occupational norm

Participant 7

Table 7: Verbatim Quotes and Emergent Themes – Participant 7

Verbatim Quote	Code	Emergent Theme
Managing administrative tasks alongside judicial duties created constant pressure and feelings of unfinished work.	Role overload, Administrative burden	Dual-role occupational stress
No matter how much I completed, pending tasks remained.	Task accumulation, Chronic pressure	Perceived inefficiency stress
I missed interpersonal relationships gatherings due to extended office hours.	Social withdrawal, Work intrusion	Interpersonal relationships relationship strain
Even at home, emotional exhaustion affected the quality of interactions.	Emotional fatigue, Reduced engagement	Relational impact
Delegation and structured scheduling reduced some stress.	Time management, Task prioritization	Problem-focused coping
Digital tools and administrative staff support would ease workload.	Structural support need	Organizational recommendation
Stress management workshops are rarely attended due to workload.	Limited utilization, Time constraint barrier	Institutional limitation
A collaborative culture would reduce isolation.	Team-based support, Team cohesion	Organizational culture reform

Participant 8

Table 8: Verbatim Quotes and Emergent Themes – Participant 8

Verbatim Quote	Code	Emergent Theme
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Public expectations from judges are extremely high, which creates constant internal pressure.	Performance expectation, Internalized pressure	Occupational performance stress
I sometimes experienced panic-like symptoms before high-profile hearings.	Acute anxiety, Physiological arousal	Psychological stress response
My spouse reported that I had become emotionally distant during peak workload periods.	Emotional withdrawal, Marital concern	Relationship distancing
I avoided discussing stressful cases at home to protect my family.	Emotional suppression, Boundary attempt	Protective coping
Regular exercise helped stabilize my mood.	Physical coping, Emotional regulation	Health-based coping
Confidential counseling should be normalized within judiciary.	Mental health normalization	Institutional reform need
Caseload reduction is essential to prevent burnout.	Overload recognition, Burn-out prevention	Structural reform

Discussion

This study sought to explore the mental health consequences of occupational stress on interpersonal relationships among judicial officers through in-depth semi-structured interviews with eight participants. Thematic analysis revealed consistent, layered, and interrelated patterns organized under five superordinate themes: occupational stressors in judicial work, psychological and physical impact of occupational stress, impact on interpersonal relationships and family relationships, coping mechanisms and protective factors, and institutional gaps and reform needs.

The findings not only align with established occupational stress and work–family literature but also extend existing scholarship by illuminating the relational and identity-based consequences of judicial stress within a culturally embedded institutional framework. One of the most compelling findings of this study is that judicial stress is not merely workload-driven but morally and interpersonal relationship amplified. Participants described persistent exposure to public scrutiny, media attention, political sensitivity, and high-profile case responsibility. Unlike conventional occupational stressors that revolve around productivity metrics or financial targets, judicial stress carries ethical permanence—decisions impact lives, reputations, and interpersonal relationships order.

This aligns with Karasek’s Demand–Control Model (1979), which posits that high-demand environments with constrained emotional autonomy increase psychological strain.

However, the findings extend this model by introducing the dimension of moral accountability. Judicial officers internalized their decisions not only as professional obligations but as societal judgments. This internalization intensified anticipatory anxiety and hyper-responsibility.

Emotional exposure to distressing material—such as child abuse, domestic violence, organized crime, and corruption—further compounded stress. These findings resonate with Figley's (1995) conceptualization of secondary traumatic stress and compassion fatigue. While judicial officers are not traditionally categorized as caregiving professionals, their prolonged exposure to traumatic narratives places them within a similar psychological risk framework.

Additionally, occupational isolation emerged as a structural feature of judicial work. Participants described the loneliness of ultimate decision-making authority. Although surrounded by colleagues, judicial neutrality requires emotional restraint and independence, reinforcing a culture of self-containment. This professional solitude intensifies emotional suppression and limits vulnerability expression.

The psychological consequences reported by participants reveal a pattern of sustained cognitive and emotional activation. Rumination, anticipatory anxiety, insomnia, irritability, emotional exhaustion, and decision fatigue were pervasive. Many officers described mentally replaying proceedings after court hours, indicating difficulty disengaging from work-related cognition. Sonnentag and Fritz (2015) emphasize psychological detachment from work as a critical recovery mechanism. The inability to detach, as reported by participants, likely contributes to sleep disturbances and prolonged stress activation.

Somatic symptoms—including headaches, hypertension, fatigue, weight gain, and back pain—reflect the physiological embodiment of chronic stress. These findings support the biopsychosocial model, which posits that sustained stress activation dysregulates bodily systems. Identity strain emerged as particularly profound. Several participants expressed concern that judicial responsibilities were overshadowing their personal identity. This aligns with role engulfment theory, where occupational roles dominate self-concept, reducing psychological flexibility and increasing burnout vulnerability. Perhaps the most significant contribution of this study lies in its relational lens. Judicial stress did not remain confined to courtroom spaces; rather, it infiltrated domestic and social spheres through emotional spillover.

Participants consistently described being physically present at home yet mentally preoccupied. Emotional withdrawal, irritability, reduced intimacy, missed milestones, and diminished parental engagement were common. These findings strongly align with Greenhaus and Beutell's (1985) Work–Family Conflict Theory, particularly strain-based conflict, where psychological strain transfers into family roles.

Crossover theory (Westman, 2001) further explains how stress experienced by one individual affects relational partners. Spouses' reported frustration and children's perceptions of emotional distance suggest relational crossover effects. Over time, emotional suppression practiced in professional settings appeared to generalize into personal interactions. While emotional neutrality is essential in judicial roles, prolonged suppression may diminish emotional responsiveness at home. This pattern resembles emotional blunting, where defensive detachment becomes generalized beyond its original context. Despite chronic stress, participants demonstrated resilience through adaptive coping

strategies. Peer discussions were particularly significant, offering normalization, shared understanding, and reduced professional isolation. This aligns with social support theory (Cohen & Wills, 1985), which identifies peer validation as a buffer against stress.

Family support emerged as another protective factor. Emotional reassurance and safe spaces for decompression provided grounding and emotional stability. However, this buffering effect depended on the officer's willingness to remain emotionally accessible. Individual coping strategies—including mindfulness, structured planning, exercise, journaling, gardening, and vacations—reflect both problem-focused and emotion-focused coping frameworks (Lazarus, 1984). These strategies enhanced short-term regulation but did not fully address systemic stressors. Notably, emotional suppression and avoidance were also prevalent. While adaptive for maintaining courtroom composure, prolonged reliance on suppression risks emotional numbness and relational distancing.

A critical dimension emerging from the findings concerns institutional culture. Participants repeatedly described a professional norm of endurance, emotional restraint, and stoicism. Help-seeking was limited due to stigma, workload constraints, and cultural expectations surrounding authority.

These findings align with Addis and Mahalik's (2003) research on masculine norms discouraging vulnerability in high-authority professions. Emotional literacy limitations and institutional silence surrounding mental health contribute to underutilization of available resources. Importantly, participants framed judicial stress not as personal weakness but as systemic overload. Recommendations consistently focused on structural reform: workload redistribution, digital case systems, confidential counseling, rotational assignments, and normalized mental health discourse. The findings therefore position judicial stress as an institutional health issue rather than solely an individual coping deficit.

Limitations

The study's findings should be interpreted in light of certain limitations. The small qualitative sample and specific judicial context limit generalizability. The use of self-report data may have introduced bias, and the absence of family interviews restricted triangulation of experiences. Additionally, the cross-sectional design did not allow for the examination of long-term stress effects.

Suggestions

Future research should include larger, multi-regional samples of judicial officers and employ mixed-method designs incorporating standardized measures of burnout and work-family conflict. Longitudinal studies are needed to examine the cumulative effects of occupational stress on identity and interpersonal relationships over time. Comparative research across different court levels may reveal hierarchical variations in stress experiences. Additionally, intervention-based studies evaluating mental health support and workload reform initiatives are strongly recommended.

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