

# Work-Related Stress in American Trial Judges

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**This study examines work-related stress among American trial judges using a relational model of stress, which emphasizes an individual's appraisals in a person-situation relationship. A representative sample of 88 judges completed three questionnaires addressing type and magnitude of specific work-related stressors, psychological stress symptoms, and psychosocial moderators of stress. Factor analysis revealed five types of stressors: case, litigating party, purposes and consequences of decisions, conflicts between professional and personal values, and seriousness of a criminal offense. The most stressful aspects of work relate to poorly prepared or disrespectful counsel, exercising judicial management and discretion, and highly emotional cases under public scrutiny. Correlational analyses show that stress is associated with cognitive, emotional, and behavioral symptoms, including a possible adverse impact on decision-making capacity. Results are discussed in terms of the relational model of stress.**

Researchers have established that stress can have an adverse impact on one's physical health<sup>1-5</sup> and psychological well-being.<sup>6, 7</sup> This effect is moderated, however, by intervening psychosocial variables, such as hardiness,<sup>8</sup> Type A and Type B personality styles,<sup>9</sup> sense of humor,<sup>10</sup> social support,<sup>11</sup> self-complexity<sup>12</sup> and coping.<sup>13</sup> One result of these findings is that behavioral scientists have increasingly studied adverse

effects of stress at work,<sup>14-16</sup> including the professional ranks. Several professions have been examined, including physicians and nurses,<sup>17</sup> pharmacists,<sup>17</sup> and business persons.<sup>18</sup> Very little is known, however, about the nature and impact of work-related stress on judges.

The burgeoning body of occupational stress research has identified several features of the work environment that produce stress in workers. These include the absence of control over one's workday, ambiguity about one's work responsibilities, role conflict, poor interpersonal relationships, fear of job obsolescence, lack of job security, and job content that lacks meaning and stimulation.<sup>13</sup> How these general factors may apply to the specific activities of judges has not been studied extensively.

There is little question that a judge-

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ship offers many opportunities for personal fulfillment and satisfaction, and that many judges gain significant personal rewards from their work,<sup>19</sup> which is among the most prestigious our society offers to its members. Despite the benefits, anecdotal evidence suggests that judges face unusually high levels of stress. Zimmerman<sup>20</sup> interviewed several judges and identified many sources of stress inherent to a judicial career. Among these stressors is the lack of control most trial judges have over their caseload and the type of people appearing before them. These individuals are usually not society's upstanding citizens represented by the best lawyers, but the most inadequate, unscrupulous, and marginally existing members of society. The stress from lack of control might be more manageable were judges not also chronically burdened with a backlog of cases, which can significantly tax their capacity for empathy and dispassion. According to Zimmerman,<sup>20</sup> "When the workload grows steadily, a feeling of incipient dread and helplessness can come over even the most conscientious and hardworking judge, one simply cannot get away." Other stressors identified by Zimmerman include social isolation, financial pressure, lack of performance evaluation, and information overload. Regarding social isolation, judges may be unique in the necessity of distancing themselves from long-held personal associations, often at the peak of their career. As one judge reported to Zimmerman,<sup>20</sup> "The position is obviously more lonely than private practice. Also, are certain people only nice to you be-

cause of the position? You would like to discuss cases, but are prohibited by the ethical code." Suran<sup>21</sup> has identified other stressors that judges face, including an "overdeveloped capacity to defer gratification" and an excessive need to control one's environment.

The judicial system and the public's perception of it also present stressors to a judge. These include the widespread and erroneous view that a judge's schedule is leisurely, with many recesses and postponements. Additional stressors are the incompatibility between the ideal of individualized justice and the reality of massive caseloads, the difficulty knowing how best to work with court administrators, and the incompatibility between the ideal of judicial independence and the need for supportive relationships with other judges.<sup>20</sup>

The quantitative evidence on judicial stress generally supports the anecdotal evidence just reviewed. Showalter and Martell,<sup>22</sup> for example, found that judges are overrepresented in the Type A or "high stress" category than are other professionals. The only other study that we are aware of on occupational stress among judges showed that the primary stressor is the actual work performed<sup>23</sup>; in many other professions, role conflict, employer-employee relationships, and career decisions are more stressful than the work itself.<sup>24</sup>

### **Psychological and Work-Related Stress**

Psychological stress is difficult to define. Many researchers regard it primarily as a stimulus, or cause, of deleterious

## Judicial Stress

physiological or psychological consequences.<sup>13</sup> From this point of view, stress comprises events that negatively impinge on an individual. These events may arise outside the individual, such as a confrontation with an angry individual, or within the individual, such as hunger, thirst, or the appraisal that an event is threatening. Note that some researchers<sup>25</sup> view positive and negative stressors as having similar effects on an individual. For example, a job promotion might have effects on a person similar to those of a demotion. Following Selye,<sup>26</sup> we will use the term "stressor" for the stress-as-stimulus approach.

The view of stress as a stimulus has led researchers to construct taxonomies of stressors. Elliott and Eisdorfer,<sup>27</sup> for example, propose four basic types of stressors: *acute, time-limited stressors*, such as waiting for a dental appointment or experiencing a "near miss" while driving; *stressor sequences*, which are a series of events that follow an initiating event such as job loss, divorce, or bereavement; *chronic intermittent stressors*, such as conflict-filled sexual difficulties or regular meetings with a harsh supervisor; and *chronic stressors*, such as continual job stress or a conflict-ridden marriage. Lazarus and colleagues<sup>28, 29</sup> add *daily hassles* as an important source of stress. These are less dramatic but still irritating events that may occur frequently. Examples include having too many responsibilities, being unable to find necessary work supplies, and arguments with coworkers. In the present study, we focus on chronic intermittent

stressors, chronic stressors, and daily hassles.

The taxonomy and stimulus approach to stress is useful but limited because individuals may respond differently to the same stimulus. There is no universal response to stressful stimuli; instead, one must consider the characteristics of individuals and situations that give stressful stimuli potency and meaning to that individual.

Some researchers, primarily those in biology and medicine, view stress in terms of an individual's response, that is, its effects on the person. From this standpoint, researchers speak of a person in a stress state that entails distressing, disturbing, or otherwise harmful components. One problem with the view of stress as a response is that it does not allow one to distinguish between responses that are stress related and those that are not. An accelerated heart rate, for example, may be produced by the stimulus of an angry and demanding attorney and also by that of an enjoyable game of tennis. Without reference to the stress stimulus, one cannot reliably classify a response as stressful.<sup>13</sup>

Lazarus and Folkman<sup>13</sup> point out that all definitions of stress are circular when they focus exclusively on either the stimulus or the response. Such definitions beg the question about what features of a stimulus produce a stress response, and what features of a response indicate the effects of stress stimuli. In place of the traditional stimulus or response approaches to stress, Lazarus and Folkman<sup>30</sup> propose a relational model, in which psychological stress is defined

as a "particular relationship between the person and the environment that is appraised by the person as taxing or exceeding his or her resources and endangering his or her well-being." The appraisal of an individual under a specific set of circumstances plays a critical role in this approach to stress. Lazarus and Folkman emphasize that the individual may or may not be aware of the appraisal he or she is making about a potentially stressful event. Thus, a stressful event may have harmful consequences on a person without that person's awareness of these consequences.

We conceptualize work-related stress within Lazarus and Folkman's relational framework. Our focus, of course, is on the relationship between the individual and his or her work environment. In accord with Lazarus and Folkman, we adhere to a "transactional model" of analysis, which views the person and the environment in a mutually reciprocal, bidirectional relationship. Thus, an *effect* of work stress at one point in time might be a cause at another time. We measured work stress in stimulus and in response terms, following Lazarus and Folkman's<sup>31</sup> view that "it is appropriate to measure stress as either input, response, or strained relationship, as long as the one being measured is made explicit." Our goals in this report are to identify specific stressors in the judge's work life, to assess the relationship of a judge's work environment to stress considered as a response, to examine the relationship between stress as response and psychological impairment, and finally, to explore the moderating role that

psychosocial factors such as humor and social engagement may have on stress.

### Method

**Subjects** Eighty-eight American trial judges participated in the study. All judges attended a workshop titled "Fact Finding and Decision Making," sponsored by the American Academy of Judicial Education. One component of the workshop was completing the three questionnaires used in this study.

### Measures

**National Judges Health Stress Questionnaire (NJHSQ)** This questionnaire consists of items taken from a larger survey of trial judges.<sup>32</sup> We used it to obtain demographic information and the judges' opinions on several aspects of the work environment, including degree of control experienced, pressure to move cases, satisfaction with case variety, personnel effectiveness, salary satisfaction, and global stress experienced. Each work-related item was answered on a seven-point scale.

**Judicial Stress Inventory (JSI)** The JSI is a 77-item questionnaire comprising specific stressors identified by an independent group of judges.<sup>33</sup> On a four-point scale, judges rate the frequency of occurrence (never, rarely, occasionally, always), frequency of stressfulness (never, rarely, usually, always), and intensity (not, somewhat, quite, or extremely) of 77 stressor events. The final score for each item is the frequency of occurrence plus the product of the frequency that the event is stressful and the intensity of the stress. The maximum value per item is 12, indicating that the

## Judicial Stress

event occurs "often," is "always stressful" when it occurs and is "extremely stressful." The minimum value is zero, indicating that the event never occurs.

*Brief Report Inventory (BRI)* The Brief Report Inventory (BRI) is a modified version of the Symptom Check List-90 Revised (SCL-90-R).<sup>34</sup> We selected 25 items from the SCL-90-R that seemed to measure cognitive, affective, and physical components of stress. In addition, 10 of the 25 items were altered in meaning to measure potentially adaptive effects of stress moderators.<sup>8</sup> For example, we altered "Feeling lonely even when you are with people" to read "Participated in a social event I really enjoyed."

## Results

*General Characteristics of the Sample* Demographic data show that the sample is representative of trial judges with rural and small urban jurisdictions. The average age of the 88 judges was 49 years ( $SD = 9.12$ ) and 91 percent were males. The judges had served an average of 6.5 years ( $SD = 5.6$ ) and averaged 21 years ( $SD = 9.52$ ) of total legal experience. Almost 60 percent were elected to office, and the remaining were appointed. Most judges (69%) served rural or small urban communities with populations less than 250,000. Sixty-seven percent of the judges had mixed jurisdictions, hearing both civil and criminal cases, with the possible addition of juvenile and traffic cases. Fifteen percent heard only civil cases and 16 percent heard only criminal cases. The types of court most frequently

represented are circuit (28.4%), superior (29.5%), district (21.6%), and county (11.4%) courts. Excepting the possibility of an overrepresentation of rural judges, these demographic characteristics are similar to those of a much larger survey.<sup>34</sup>

An initial question to answer is whether demographic factors affect the stress reported by the judges. To answer the question, we used analysis of variance to compare the sum of JSI scores by sex, type of court, substantive jurisdiction, method of selection, and community served. No statistically significant differences were found. In addition, correlational analyses revealed no significant relationships between JSI sum and judicial experience ( $r = -.05, p < .67$ ) and age ( $r = -.07, p < .54$ ). JSI sum correlated negatively, however, with years of legal experience ( $r = -.24, p < .02$ ). The overall absence of significant relationships between demographic variables and stress indicates that the judges can be treated as one group in subsequent analyses.

*Type and Degree of Judicial Stress Considered as Stimulus* Table 1 presents the most and least stressful JSI items. The most stressful aspects of work involve ill-prepared, inadequate, or abusive counsel. Also highly stressful are cases requiring active judicial management and decision-making discretion (as when counsel poorly represents a client or in *pro se* hearings), and highly emotional cases with strong public interest and scrutiny. In contrast, aspects of work rated as least stressful are routine cases, those that do not require signifi-

**Table 1**  
**Most and Least Stressful Aspects of Work As Measured by Judicial Stress Inventory**

Mean	Judicial Stress Inventory Item
<i>Most Stressful</i>	
5.20	Counsel is disrespectful or abusive of the judicial process.
5.11	Counsel is ill-prepared or inadequate.
4.92	Making decisions in cases in which no solution is clearly satisfactory.
4.87	Making decisions in cases where one party is poorly represented by counsel.
4.72	<i>Pro se</i> cases.
4.57	Making decisions in cases in which the emotional climate between opposing attorneys is very volatile.
4.47	Making decisions in cases in which the emotional climate between contesting parties is very volatile.
4.27	Public scrutiny of a judicial decision in a highly publicized case.
4.10	Strong public sentiment in a high publicity case.
3.98	Making decisions in cases that allow significant judicial discretion.
<i>Least Stressful</i>	
1.97	Defendant is a police officer.
1.95	Case in which obtaining execution of judgment will be difficult, if not impossible.
1.92	Plaintiff is a police officer.
1.87	Cases containing religious connotations.
1.86	Imposing a criminal sentence that the public will probably view as too severe.
1.82	Plaintiff is a "disreputable" character.
1.78	Being forced to impose a lenient mandatory sentence based on the nature of a crime without regard for the individual characteristics of the criminal.
1.70	Case involving a strong peer pressure from fellow judges.
1.58	Type of case: labor law.
1.14	Trials that are closed to the public entirely.

cant judicial discretion (e.g., where a mandatory sentence is imposed), those in which execution of a judgment appears doubtful, and those conducted without public scrutiny.

The judges also appear to experience more stress in relation to the defendant in cases than the plaintiff. They reported less stress when the plaintiff is a "disreputable" character ( $M = 1.82$  vs. 2.56, respectively), juvenile ( $M = 1.98$  vs. 3.05), police officer ( $M = 1.92$  vs. 1.97), v.i.p. ( $M = 2.18$  vs. 2.64), poor person ( $M = 2.49$  vs. 3.15), member of an eth-

nic minority ( $M = 2.41$  vs. 2.80), or woman ( $M = 2.70$  vs. 3.02), than when either is the defendant. In addition, the judges report more stress when imposing a sentence that the public may view as too lenient than one as too severe. Interestingly, the judges rated peer-pressure stress as comparatively low.

*Factor Analysis of JSI* With factor analysis, one gains a different perspective on stress. Rather than ordering items according to their magnitude, factor analysis groups them according to correlations between the items. The goal

## Judicial Stress

of factor analysis is to statistically reduce a large number of variables to a smaller number of "factors" that are presumed to underlie the correlations between the original variables. The resulting factors are then interpreted according to their correlations with the original variables. We submitted the JSI to a principal components factor analysis using a varimax rotation. This is a commonly used form of factor analysis. Five interpretable factors were extracted, together accounting for 51 percent of the variance among the 77 JSI items. Table 2 presents the JSI items that correlated greater than .5 on each factor.

Factor 1 measures stress related to the type of case the judge is presiding over. Particularly stressful are complex and "high profile" cases that may have consequences for many individuals (as in class action suits and cases involving civil rights or religion). Also stressful are cases requiring considerable decision-making latitude and active judicial management, or those with potential for later appellate review.

Factor 2 reflects concern for the parties involved in a case, particularly vulnerable or "special" plaintiffs and defendants. These include members of ethnic minorities, the poor, juveniles, women, "disreputable" characters, "v.i.p.s," and police officers.

Factor 3 measures stress about the purposes and consequences of one's decisions. Items loading highly on this factor refer to providing justification for one's decision, especially where no clear legal precedent has been set and where little solid evidence is available. It also

includes concerns for whether the purpose of sentencing is retribution, deterrence, or reform. An additional factor is concern about public sentiment about a decision.

Factor 4 reflects conflict between professional and personal values. Items correlating highly on Factor 4 include making decisions that are clearly "correct" from the legal perspective, but with which the judge has moral or pragmatic grounds for disagreement.

The highest loading items on Factor 5 suggest stress related to the seriousness of criminal offenses. Awareness of "law and order" concerns in one's community may also play a role in this factor.

***Work Experiences and Stress*** In this section we shift from viewing stress in stimulus terms to viewing it as a response to a judge's work experiences. We measured stress as a response in two ways: by summing each judge's JSI score and by each judge's direct report of stress, as reported on the National Judges Health Stress Questionnaire (NJHSQ). The two stress measures differ in important ways. The detailed and summary nature of the JSI is a more detailed and comprehensive stress measure because it covers many aspects of a judge's work life. As indicated earlier, the JSI score is the product of 231 discrete decisions (77 items  $\times$  3 ratings per item). On the other hand, the NJHSQ stress item captures a judge's global, subjective experience of stress. The measure is based on the judge's response on a six-point scale to the question, "How much stress are you currently experiencing?" (1 = no stress, 6 = extreme stress).

**Table 2**  
**Correlations Between Judicial Stress Inventory (JSI) Factors and JSI Items\***

<i>r</i>	JSI Item
<i>Factor 1: Type of Case</i>	
.65	Large (i.e., class action) as opposed to small case.
.63	Case involving a clear "underdog" (as perceived by community or press).
.63	Highly complex or technical case outside your field of knowledge where expert testimony is crucial.
.59	Case involving a large degree of judicial management and active participation in moving the case along.
.58	Prospect of your decision being overturned on appeal by a higher court based on a "doctrinal issue."
.57	Prestigious attorney involved in case.
.57	Making decisions in cases that allow significant judicial discretion.
.57	Knowing that your decision will be followed or looked to by later courts.
.57	Any <i>ex parte</i> hearing, especially those involving injunctions.
.57	Prospect of your decision being overturned on appeal by a higher court based on a "technical issue."
.56	Making decisions in cases in which the emotional climate between opposing attorneys is very volatile.
.54	Case posing possible personal danger or other security problems.
.52	Public scrutiny of a judicial decision in a highly publicized case.
.51	Type of case: civil rights and liberties.
.50	Cases containing religious connotations.
<i>Factor 2: Type of Litigant</i>	
.76	Plaintiff is a member of an ethnic minority.
.75	Defendant is a poor person.
.73	Plaintiff is a poor person.
.62	Defendant is a woman.
.61	Plaintiff is a juvenile.
.57	Plaintiff is a woman.
.55	Defendant is a police officer.
.51	Defendant is a "disreputable" character.
.51	Plaintiff is a v.i.p.
<i>Factor 3: Purpose of Decision</i>	
.72	Purpose of decision: combination of retribution, deterrence, or reform.
.65	Plaintiff is a police officer.
.60	Having to explain or justify your decision.
.57	Purpose of decision: reform.
.56	Strong public sentiment in a high publicity case.
.51	Purpose of decision: deterrence.
.51	Type of case: private economic.
.49	Fear of the future consequences (for yourself) of your decision.
.49	Apparent lack of pertinent analogies to your case (or precedents) in the case law.

\* Table includes only JSI items correlating greater than .5 with factor.



**Judicial Stress**

**Table 2—Continued**

<i>r</i>	JSI Item
<i>Factor 4: Professional and Personal Values Conflict</i>	
.59	Making decisions in cases in which no solution is clearly satisfactory.
.59	Making a decision that, although clearly "correct" from a legal perspective, you disagree with from a moral point of view.
.59	Making a decision that, although clearly "correct" from a legal perspective, you disagree with from a pragmatic point of view.
.55	Case in which obtaining execution of judgment will be difficult, if not impossible.
.55	Political pressures if an elected judge.
.53	Type of case: lifestyle issues such as gay rights or child custody disputes.
<i>Factor 5: Seriousness of Criminal Offense</i>	
.75	Seriousness of the offense.
.69	Extent of offender's previous criminal record, if any.
.62	Type of case: criminal law.
.62	Type of case: alcohol/drugs involved.
.49	Perception that there is a serious crime problem in your jurisdiction.

**Table 3**  
**Correlation of Two Stress Measures with Work Experience\***

Work Experience	JSI Sum†	NJHSQ Stress‡
Effective skill utilization (7 = effective, 1 = ineffective)	.06	-.28**
Case variety (7 = too much, 1 = too little)	.22*	.20
Control of work day (7 = full control, 1 = no control)	-.04	-.37***
Case backlog caseload (7 = very serious problem, 1 = no problem)	.16	.34***
Pressure to move cases (7 = too much, 1 = too little)	.30**	.38***
Effectiveness of courtroom personnel (7 = effective, 1 = ineffective)	.03	-.16
Salary satisfaction (7 = overpaid, 1 = underpaid)	-.04	-.01
Number of cases heard per month	-.03	.14
Jury trials heard per month	.05	.06

\*  $p < .05$ ; \*\*  $p < .01$ ; \*\*\*  $p < .001$ .

† JSI Sum is the sum of items on the Judicial Stress Inventory.

‡ NJHSQ Stress is the response on a six-point scale to the question, "How much stress are you currently experiencing?" (1 = no stress, 6 = extreme stress).

Table 3 summarizes the correlations between the stress measures and work experiences, as measured on the NJHSQ. As shown, stress is positively correlated with case backlog, pressure to move cases, and excess variety in cases. Skill utilization and control over one's workday negatively correlated with stress. It is noteworthy that control over one's

workday is a stronger predictor of stress than is workload itself. This finding is shown by the stronger relationship between the NJHSQ stress measure and control of workday than between both stress measures and number of cases heard per month and number of jury trials heard per month. We also ran correlations between each of the five JSI

factors, as measured by the sum of items loading greater than .5 on each factor, and all work experience variables. Since the pattern of results was very similar to those shown by the sums of the entire JSI, we presented only the latter in Table 3.

***Judicial Stress, Psychological Impairment, and Psychosocial Moderators*** A final set of analyses dealt with the relationship work-related stress may have with psychological impairment and psychosocial stress moderators. As shown in Table 4, several Brief Response Inventory (BRI) items correlated strongly with the JSI and/or NJHSQ stress measures. Positively associated with stress are feelings of tension, work blocks, feeling disliked by others, expressions of irritation with others, lack of interest in activities, not feeling appreciated, restlessness, negative feelings about one's professional role, and difficulty making decisions. As a whole, these findings show that stress interferes with many aspects of a judge's work routine.

We assessed the moderating effect of psychosocial variables on stress by correlating those variables with stress. We expected these variables to correlate negatively with the stress variables. As shown in Table 4, five correlated significantly with at least one stress measure. However, only three of the five correlated negatively with stress: feeling positive about one's professional role, taking time to relax, and experiencing a sense of "doing a good job." Taking a break from work and expressing irritation toward others correlated positively with stress.

## Discussion

This study extends an earlier report showing that judges are overrepresented in the "Type A" or "high stress" personality style.<sup>22</sup> The present study identifies a broad set of specific judicial stressors, empirically classifies them, orders them by magnitude, and correlates them to demographic information, the judge's work environment, and several psychological symptom measures.

The findings are consistent with previous reports of judicial stress. For example, the positive correlations between stress and case variety, case backlog, and pressure to move cases is consistent with Zimmerman's observation that case and information overload are sources of stress. The findings are also consistent with research on stress in other occupations and professions, particularly regarding the importance of control over one's workday. The findings extend the report of Rogers *et al.*<sup>23</sup> that the work itself rather than role ambiguity, employer-employee relations, and career decisions is critical in judicial stress. In addition, the factor analysis shows that one can classify judicial stress according to type of case, type of litigating party, the purpose of a decision, a judge's value conflicts, and the seriousness of an offense.

Prominent in the results are the findings that exercising judicial discretion and case management are highly stressful. Lazarus and Folkman's model of stress helps explain this finding. They propose that an important factor influencing a person's appraisal of a potentially stressful situation is his or her

**Table 4**  
**Correlation of Two Stress Measures with Symptoms and Psychosocial Moderators**

Brief Report Inventory	JSI Sum†	NJHSQ Stress‡
<i>Symptoms</i>		
Trouble remembering things.	.06	.06
Feeling easily annoyed.	.31**	.30**
Poor appetite.	.18	.25*
Temper outbursts that you could not control.	.17	.21*
Feeling blocked in getting things done.	.51***	.44***
Feeling no interest in things.	.37***	.27**
Feeling that people are unfriendly or dislike you.	.41***	.24*
Trouble falling asleep.	.20	.24**
Having to check and double check what you do.	.30**	.22*
Trouble concentrating.	.18	.17
Feeling tense or keyed up.	.39**	.61***
Getting into frequent arguments.	.31**	.19
Others not giving you proper credit for your achievements.	.47***	.22*
Feeling so restless you couldn't sit still.	.38***	.36***
Difficulty making decisions.	.40***	.33**
<i>Psychosocial moderators</i>		
Participated in a social event I really enjoyed.	-.15	-.20
Used a sense of humor to diffuse anxiety or tension.	-.02	-.04
Expressed irritation or aggravation toward others who have troubled or frustrated me.	.43***	.17
Had a frank conversation with a trusted friend in which you disclosed true feelings or attitudes.	.18	.18
Took a break from work because things weren't progressing well or working out properly.	.17	.21*
Adopted a flexible attitude toward something that could otherwise have caused considerable interpersonal conflict.	.12	.07
Felt positive about my professional role.	-.22*	-.38***
Took time to relax or meditate and "put things in perspective."	-.07	-.25*
Engaged in physical exercise.	.02	-.10
Experienced a sense of "doing a good job."	-.14	-.29**

\*  $p < .05$ ; \*\*  $p < .01$ ; \*\*\*  $p < .001$ .

† JSI Sum is the sum of items on the Judicial Stress Inventory.

‡ NJHSQ Stress is the response on a six-point scale to the question, "How much stress are you currently experiencing?" (1 = no stress, 6 = extreme stress).

"commitments," that is, the choices, values, and goals that determine what is "at stake" in a particular situation. Lazarus and Folkman posit that commitments relate to a person's vulnerability to psychological stress: the deeper a person's commitment, the greater the potential threat or harm. Presumably, a judge's commitments include competence, intelligence, and fairness, all of which are challenged when he or she presides over a case requiring exercise greater than

usual discretionary authority or case management. These commitments may also explain why high profile cases and public scrutiny of a case are stressful for judges. Research shows that the more public a commitment is, the more threatening are challenges to it.<sup>35</sup> Of course, commitments can also operate as a motivating force for a judge to increase his coping skills in warding off threats. This may explain why some judges respond to these stressors with

psychological symptoms, but others do not. In research now underway, we are analyzing the relationship between a judge's commitments and vulnerability to work-related stress.

An intriguing question that these data address, but ultimately leave unanswered, refers to the effects of stress on job performance, specifically, the judge's decision-making ability. Our findings show correlations between work-related stress, decision-making difficulty, and feeling "blocked." We do not, however, directly measure whether stress alters or impairs decision making. Research by Janis<sup>36</sup> shows that highly stressful conditions can be detrimental to decision making; however, Lazarus and Eriksen<sup>37</sup> show that one must take individual differences into account. The implication for the present study is that personality and actual job performance must both be measured to directly assess whether stress impairs a judge's decision-making ability.

The data provide partial support for the hypothesis that psychosocial factors moderate the effects of stress. Some BRI items aimed at measuring psychosocial moderators were correlated negatively with stress, as predicted, but others were not. This inconclusiveness is consistent with other studies of stress moderators.<sup>38, 39</sup>

At least two methodological factors limit the interpretations of these findings. First, self-report data have well-known limitations, including the possibility of response biases such as over- or underreporting biases.<sup>40</sup> The limitation is difficult to overcome, however, when

one takes a cognitive appraisal approach to stress, which requires an assessment of an individual's appraisals of stress. Considering the conditioning that many judges internalize against making self-disclosures, our data more likely reflect underreporting than overreporting of stress. Second, no systematic sampling procedures were used to select respondents and thus assure a representative sample. Nevertheless, comparison with results from a larger study showed that the present sample is highly representative of rural and small urban judges.

It is important to note that this study is not about "impaired" judges, but about the stressors that normal, hard-working judges contend with on a daily basis. The findings can provide a rationale for interventions aimed at enabling judges better cope with the inevitable stressors awaiting them at work.

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