

Development of Stress Resistance in Advocacy

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ABSTRACT

This article explores stress resilience as a fundamental psychological and professional competence in advocacy. Modern legal practice is characterized by high levels of emotional tension, responsibility, and uncertainty, which significantly influence lawyers' performance, decision-making, and overall well-being. Drawing on classical stress theories developed by Walter Cannon and Hans Selye, as well as contemporary coping theory proposed by Richard Lazarus, the article analyzes the nature, types, and stages of stress in legal practice. Particular attention is given to coping strategies, emotional intelligence, and psychological competence as key mechanisms for managing stress. The study also highlights the specific stress factors inherent in advocacy, including conflict-driven environments, emotional engagement with clients, and information overload. It is argued that strengthening stress resilience enhances professional efficiency, reduces burnout risks, and contributes to the quality of legal services and public trust in the legal system.

KEYWORDS

Stress resilience, advocacy, legal psychology, coping strategies, emotional intelligence, burnout, professional competence, legal ethics.

INTRODUCTION

Modern legal practice operates under conditions of rapid transformation, increasing complexity of legislation, and growing societal expectations. In such an environment, lawyers are exposed to continuous psycho-emotional pressure, heightened responsibility, and uncertainty. These factors make stress resilience not merely an individual trait but a critical professional necessity. As noted in occupational psychology, professions involving intensive interpersonal interaction are particularly vulnerable to chronic stress and burnout.[1]

The professional activity of a lawyer belongs to the professions of the "human-human" type and is characterized by the following stress-generating factors:

1. High level of responsibility. A lawyer's decisions and actions directly affect the rights, freedoms, and property interests of the principal.
2. Emotionally impactful, effective communication. Working with individuals in crisis situations (criminal prosecution, family disputes, property disputes) requires constant emotional engagement.

3. Conflict nature of activity. Court proceedings involve the confrontation of parties and the need to defend one's position under pressure from opponents.

4. Information overloads. Large volume of legal data analysis, constant changes in legislation and judicial practice.

5. Non-standardised work schedule. Preparing for court hearings, participating in investigative actions, and providing urgent consultations.

An additional factor is the need for public speeches, which require high concentration and emotional control.

The relevance of studying the stress resistance of lawyers is due not only to the specifics of their professional role, but also to an increase in the number of professional risks, including emotional fatigue, professional deformation, and a decrease in the quality of legal assistance.

In modern society, advocacy has enormous social significance. The legal profession is among the stress-generating professions associated with high responsibility, stress, and increased psychological demands. Psychological training, the development of stress resistance skills are important in increasing the professional effectiveness of a lawyer, reducing stress and mental tension.

Stress plays a huge role in the work of a lawyer and has a significant impact on the lawyer's work efficiency, decision-making ability, and personal life.

The complexity and diversity of stress forms led to the formation of various scientific approaches to the study of this phenomenon. Stress is a universal, non-specific psychophysiological and neurohormonal reaction, arising in response to the influence of a stressor, manifested in changes in the activity of the nervous and endocrine systems of the human body.

Stress is a natural response aimed at maintaining the stability and health of the "brain-body" system and adapting the body to changing environmental conditions.

The term "stress" was first introduced into physiology and psychology by Walter Cannon, who explained this state through a universal reaction known as "fight or flight."

Stress is also interpreted as a state of mental (emotional) and behavioural disorders associated with a person's inability to act rationally and purposefully in a stressful situation.

In other words, stress is a psychophysiological defense reaction that arises as a result of the organism's deviation from the adaptive norm under the influence of extreme environmental factors or strong stimulating stimuli.

The famous Canadian pathophysiologicalist Hans Selye[2] was the first to scientifically explain the neurophysiological mechanism of stress reactions in the body and is known as the author of the concept of "general adaptation syndrome."

Hans Selye's research scientifically substantiated the existence of not only negative, but also positive (adaptive) aspects of stress. He interpreted stress as a mechanism of the human body's adaptation to various external influences.

In his works, the scientist expressed the following thoughts: "Unlike popular views, we should not and cannot avoid stress. But if we understand its mechanism better and develop a corresponding life philosophy, we can use it and enjoy it." He also expressed the essence of stress with the following famous words: "It is not stress itself that destroys us, but our stress reaction."

These ideas express the main idea of Hans Selye's theory. According to the scientist, it is impossible to completely avoid stress in a person's life, but by managing stress and reacting to it correctly, it is possible to reduce its negative consequences and even achieve positive results. Therefore, a conscious and balanced approach to stress is one of the most important factors ensuring a person's physical health and psychological stability.

Hans Selye is also considered the first scientist to scientifically substantiate the state of "stress." In his research, he developed a three-stage "general adaptation syndrome" model of stress. These stages include:

1. Mobilization (awareness or warning stage) - the organism responds to the stressor with anxiety and tension. In this process, the nervous and endocrine systems are activated, protective mechanisms are activated, and the body mobilises its resources to fight stress.
2. Confrontation (adaptation or resistance stage) - the organism develops resistance to the stressful factor and tries to adapt to it. The individual actively seeks a way out of the source of stress, which maintains the body's active defensive state for a certain period of time.
3. Fatigue (the stage of completion or destruction) - as a result of the long-term impact of a stress factor, the body's protective resources decrease, the body begins to tire, the immune system weakens, and sensitivity to various secondary threats increases.

Selye emphasizes that each of these processes is a natural adaptation mechanism in human life, and managing and timely stopping them is crucial for maintaining human health and mental stability.

In the context of legal practice, stress manifests through a combination of cognitive, emotional, and behavioural factors. Advocates operate in highly conflictual environments where opposing interests must be balanced, often under strict procedural constraints. As noted by legal psychologists, the adversarial nature of legal proceedings creates constant tension, requiring lawyers to maintain composure while advocating vigorously for their clients. [3] Moreover, the necessity of engaging with clients who are often in distress—such as those involved in criminal cases or family disputes—demands a high degree of emotional intelligence and empathy.

Another important aspect is emotional engagement. Lawyers frequently interact with clients facing crisis situations, such as criminal prosecution or family disputes. These interactions require empathy, emotional intelligence, and psychological sensitivity. According to Goleman [4], emotional intelligence plays a crucial role in managing interpersonal relationships and maintaining psychological balance, particularly in high-stress professions such as law.

Types of stress

Eustress - positive stress, arising under the influence of pleasant feelings. It increases the body's physical and mental endurance, ensures adaptation to the stress factor, and stimulates activity.

Distress - a type of negative stress that weakens the body's defense forces, disrupts adaptation mechanisms, and causes various psychosomatic diseases. As a result, labour productivity, mental activity, and nervous system function decrease.

Emotional stress - occurs as a result of prolonged negative emotions, psychological stress occurs as a result of social pressure or external influences. Psychological stress, when moderate, provides adaptation, but when excessive, it harms health. In the literature, this condition is also called "emotional" or "psycho-emotional stress," which indicates the close connection between stress and emotions. As well as acute, chronic,, informational, physical, and occupational stress.

In legal practice, every lawyer must develop their own coping strategies.

Coping strategies

Coping is a set of conscious psychological techniques that help overcome stress. Coping strategies depend on a person's personal characteristics, experience, and the real situation, and are formed differently for everyone. Therefore, the same phenomenon can affect a person differently at different stages of life.

Coping strategies and psychological resilience

Coping strategies are conscious cognitive and behavioral actions of a person aimed at alleviating stress, overcoming life problems, and maintaining psychological balance. They manifest themselves as dynamic psychological processes aimed at overcoming external or internal demands, which are valued higher than a person's ability to overcome a problem.

In other words, coping strategy is a person's psychological readiness for various life trials and difficulties and their ability to respond to them.

Two stages of the copying process

According to the theory of Lazarus and Folkman [5], the coping process consists of a two-stage evaluation.

Primary assessment - a person analyzes the situation and seeks an answer to the question of whether it threatens their life, safety, or values.

Secondary assessment - an individual assesses their existing capabilities and determines what measures they can take to change the situation, reduce negative consequences, or achieve a positive result.

This process is directly related to the formation and development of a person's psychological competence, that is, such qualities as emotional intelligence, adaptive intelligence, conflictological competence, psychological plasticity, and psychological resilience.

Stress is an integral part of a lawyer's career, but the ability to manage it is an important condition for professional success. When a lawyer enters their professional activity, it is important that they have developed the skill of stress resistance.

The term "stress resistance" is interpreted as an integrative personal quality, including emotional stability, developed mechanisms of self-control, adequate self-esteem, a high level of professional motivation, tolerance to frustrations (hopelessness), endurance and the ability to constructively overcome difficulties, cognitive reassessment of problematic, stressful situations. In legal psychology, stress resistance is considered a condition for the reliability of professional activity and a factor in preventing destructive situations.

Lawyers perform important functions in ensuring and protecting the rights and interests of citizens, which affects the credibility and stability of public relations.

Modern conditions of a lawyer's professional activity place high demands on him. A lawyer must know and be able to do many things. He must have a good knowledge of laws and be able to analyze and apply them, be legally mobile, work with documents, draw up petitions and statements, have computer skills, speak publicly, and much more. But even this is not enough. The success of a practicing lawyer's work depends not only on professional knowledge, skills, and abilities, but also on their personal qualities, the development of psychological skills, the ability to communicate effectively, the ability to establish trusting, psychologically comfortable interpersonal relationships, the ability to manage one's emotions, the ability to constructively resolve conflicts, prevent conflict escalation, and organize effective work. In the professional activity of a lawyer, the development of psychological aspects and stress resistance skills has always been one of the most important components of his

professional activity.

Furthermore, cognitive biases represent a significant challenge in legal decision-making. As demonstrated by Kahneman[6], systematic errors in thinking can lead to incorrect judgments and decisions. In legal practice, such biases may affect case analysis, interpretation of evidence, and strategic decision-making. Therefore, developing critical thinking and self-reflection skills is essential for minimizing these risks.

The professional environment of advocacy also involves significant ethical challenges. Lawyers must adhere to strict ethical standards while navigating complex situations involving conflicts of interest, confidentiality, and professional responsibility. Maintaining ethical integrity under conditions of stress requires strong self-regulation and moral awareness.

To effectively carry out their activities, a lawyer of today must possess a number of psychological characteristics necessary for this profession. A lawyer, as a person protecting the rights and freedoms of citizens and organizations, not pursuing their own interests, cannot work without psychological knowledge about themselves, their representatives of trust, clients, and the capabilities of a psychologist specialist in court proceedings, without professionally significant characteristics.

Characteristics of professional significance are characteristics that influence the effectiveness of carrying out professional activity. They are a condition of professional activity and its new formation, as they develop and improve in the labour process. Professional characteristics cannot be separated from personality structure. The legal profession involves communication, contact with various people, the popularity, reputation, and reliability of its representatives, and all these characteristics are largely determined by the attractiveness of the lawyer's image. Law - in all its spheres, forms, and interrelationships. An integral quality of a professional is a comprehensive approach to the situation, a qualified legal assessment, and the search for legal solutions to the problem.

In the development of a lawyer's stress resistance skills, of course, it is important, first of all, to analyze a number of psychological problems that a lawyer faces in their professional activity.

The psychological problems faced by lawyers, of course, require serious knowledge in the field of modern psychology. A person who has legal problems that require contacting a lawyer, as a rule, also has psychological problems. Without taking into account and reducing their tension, it is impossible to properly build relationships with such a person, to predict the results of cooperation. A lawyer, defending the interests of an authorised representative in various agencies, interacts with various people whose outcome of his work depends. The degree of influence on them is largely determined by their psychological competence. Finally, the psychological literacy of a lawyer depends on the feeling of satisfaction with their work, motives for success in professional activity, and the desire for self-improvement and self-expression.

The professional activity of a lawyer is carried out based on legal activity. Legal activity - activity related to legal norms. A distinctive feature of a lawyer's professional activity is that the main object of their activity is the individual and their relationship with them under strict legal regulation. In their work, a lawyer faces the need to understand the relationships between people, to evaluate their actions from the point of view of law, to observe the most diverse manifestations of their activities in the most difficult situations of citizens' lives. Consequently, the profession not only has high social significance, but also assumes responsibility. A number of features distinguish this professional activity from other professions:

- extraordinary diversity of tasks that need to be solved in the legal space;
- full definition of activities by legislative norms;

- legal regulation of the communicative aspect of activity;
- high emotional tension of work associated with the need to suppress negative emotions.

CONCLUSION

Stress resilience is a fundamental prerequisite for effective and ethically responsible legal practice. The specific nature of advocacy, characterized by high responsibility, conflict, and emotional intensity, creates conditions of continuous stress exposure. However, as demonstrated by classical and contemporary research, stress can be effectively managed through the development of coping strategies, emotional intelligence, and psychological competence.

Strengthening stress resilience among lawyers contributes not only to their mental health but also to the quality of legal services, the credibility of the legal profession, and the effective administration of justice. Therefore, the integration of psychological training into legal education and professional development programs is essential for preparing lawyers to meet the challenges of modern legal practice.

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