

## ORIGINAL ARTICLE

## Gender Differences in Psychological Distress and Psychological Well-Being among Lawyers

Naeema Arzeen<sup>1\*</sup>, Maryum Hamid<sup>1</sup>, Mubashar Shah<sup>2</sup>, Saima Arzeem<sup>3</sup>, Ghulam Mustafa<sup>4</sup>, Zaheer ul Hassan<sup>5</sup>

## ABSTRACT

**Objective:** This study was designed to find the gender differences in psychological distress and psychological well-being (PWB) among lawyers.

**Study Design:** Cross sectional study.

**Place and Duration of Study:** The study was conducted from January 2018 to April 2018 at Islamabad and Rawalpindi High courts.

**Materials and Methods:** Purposive sampling technique was used. A sample of 110 lawyers (male = 55 & female = 55) were recruited for the study. Two scales, psychological distress-10 and psychological well-being was used for data collection.

**Results:** For the investigation of relationship Pearson, product moment correlation was computed with the help of SPSS-21v. The results indicated that both parameters (psychological distress and psychological well-being) were negatively correlated ( $r = -.40$ ). To examine the gender regarding differences t-test was used. Significant gender related difference was observed on psychological distress ( $t = 2.09, p < .05$ ) where female lawyers reported higher level of distress than male lawyers, whereas on well-being non-significant gender difference was found.

**Conclusion:** The findings of our study concluded that lawyers with high psychological distress reported lower level of psychological well-being; and overall female lawyers experienced more psychological distress (because of extra responsibilities of profession, home, and family) than their male counterparts.

**Key Words:** Gender, Psychological Distress, Psychological Well-Being.

**How to cite this:** Arzeen N, Hamid M, Shah M, Arzeem S, Mustafa G, Hassan Z. Gender Differences in Psychological Distress and Psychological Well-Being among Lawyers. *Life and Science*. 2022; 3(2): 76-79. doi: <http://doi.org/10.37185/LnS.1.1.192>

This is an Open Access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution License (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0>), which permits unrestricted use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original work is properly cited.

## Introduction

A legal career is loaded with chronic stress because of many reasons like over burden, commitment, deadlines, burnout, busy schedules, and lack of free

time; so, all these reasons lead to psychological distress and poor mental health.<sup>1</sup> Overcommitted lawyers deal with many clients and take every case as a challenge but when they have depressed clients that affect their overall psychological well-being. Almost 28% licensed lawyers experienced depression, 19% had anxiety, and 21% used drugs.<sup>2</sup> In our local context, there is insufficient research work on this great necessity; so, this research aims to probe psychological distress and psychological well-being among lawyers. Individuals when suffer from cognitive, emotional and spiritual issues due to troublesome of inner conditions of "depression and anxiety". It can be from a moderate to a serious level which refers to severe disorders.<sup>3</sup> There are various sources of stress which are as follows; Intrinsic to the job (e.g., poor physical working conditions and time pressures); role in the organization (e.g., conflict);

<sup>1</sup>Department of Psychology  
National University of Modern Languages (NUML), Islamabad

<sup>2,5</sup>Department of Psychiatry  
Combined Military Hospital (CMH), Peshawar

<sup>3</sup>Department of Psychology,  
University of Peshawar, Peshawar

<sup>4</sup>Department of Community Medicine  
HBS Hospital, Islamabad

Correspondence:

Ms. Naeema Arzeen  
Clinical Psychologist  
Department of Psychology  
National University of Modern Languages (NUML), Islamabad  
E-mail: [naeemaareen@yahoo.com](mailto:naeemaareen@yahoo.com)

Funding Source: NIL; Conflict of Interest: NIL  
Received: Mar 19, 2021; Revised: Mar 01, 2022  
Accepted: Mar 20, 2022

career development (e.g., promotion); relationships at work, (e.g., poor relationships); and organizational structure (e.g., decision-making).<sup>4</sup> Psychological well-being is characterized how well an individual can react to difficulties of life and adjust life especially in the time of emergency".<sup>5</sup> Dimensions of well-being are; Self-acceptance, Personal growth, Purpose in life, Environmental mastery, Autonomy, and Positive relations with others.<sup>6</sup> When you practice law stress comes with the territory". They reported that in law practicing lawyers had a higher level of stress which affect them badly and damaged their overall mental and physical health; due to this they couldn't deal with their clients in a better way.<sup>7</sup> Cases defended by lawyers and life of their clients are in jeopardy because their distress is harming their well-being and capacity of work.<sup>8</sup>

One study conducted to investigate the gender differences on distress. In a study men (85%) want to continue the same job while women (73%). Female lawyers are sensitive than men lawyers but male lawyers are more prone to alcohol related behaviors.<sup>9</sup> Similarly, another recent most study conducted on risk factor for mental health among licensed attorney revealed that the occurrence of severe psychological distress was higher among female licensed attorney than male licensed attorney.<sup>10</sup>

Previous literature depicted that how strain of cases, burn out, deadlines, commitments, and dealing with the problems of clients' leads to stress and poor well-being in Lawyers. As the Pakistani society is male dominating society. Some professions are considered very gender specific in Pakistan. For instances, police, lawyers, IT specialist, pilots, manufacturing, electricians, mechanical engineers etc. However, now a days we have noticed the change that women are joining in these professions in great numbers. But the overall circumstances for women are not that much good especially in legal department. Pakistani female lawyers not only faces the problems of discrimination in getting access to opportunities in their profession but also faces extra burden due to their different roles and high professional commitments. Despite of the fact that number of studies had been conducted among lawyers in Pakistan. But most of this research are mainly focused on the variables of occupational

stress, burn out, risk factors, depression and anxiety.<sup>11</sup> Therefore, there is a need to conduct research that not only highlights the link between the psychological distress and psychological well-being but also gender differences among lawyers.

**Materials and Methods**

The aim of this study was to examine the gender related differences on psychological distress and psychological well-being among lawyers. Further, explore the gender differences in psychological distress and psychological well-being. A total sample of 110 lawyers (Male = 55 and Female = 55) working at 'Islamabad high court was selected from purposive sampling technique. Those licensed lawyers were approached in their chambers located in various places in Rawalpindi and Islamabad. For data collection, prior permissions were taken from the participants on call and they were informed about the confidentiality of information. Afterwards, participants were approached personally in their chambers where they were given a set of self-reported measures (English versions) of Psychological Distress Scale<sup>10</sup> (K-10; 10 items with a 5-point Likert scale) and Psychological Well-being<sup>6</sup> (42 items with 6-point Likert scale). These scales were available openly accessible online and there is no need to get any permission from the authors. At the end, Participants were thanked for their support. To meet the objectives and to test the proposed hypotheses different type of statistical techniques (Pearson product moment correlation and t-test) were used. Data analysis was done by using SPSS version 21.

**Results**

Descriptive statistics were obtained for all study variables; Table 1 shows that there is variation of mean and standard deviation on all scores. The value of skewness shows that it is negative but normally distributed. Mean, SD, and alpha reliability showed that both scales were reliable psychological distress (Mean ± SD 33.28 ± 7.44, α=.86) and psychological

**Table 1: Descriptive for Psychological distress and Psychological well being (N=110)**

Variables	M	SD	K	.86	Range		Skewness	Kurtosis
					Potential	Actual		
K-10	33.28	7.44	10	.86	5-50	12-46	-.59	-.30
PWB	160.79	19.06	42	.82	6-252	88-213	-.99	1.35

Note: K-10= Kessler 10; PWB= Psychological well-being

well-being (Mean ± SD 160.79 ± 19.06, α=.82). Table 2 indicates the negative relationship between psychological distress and psychological well-being (r=-.40\*\*<0.01).

**Table 2: Correlations between the Psychological distress and Psychological well-being (N=110)**

Scales	PWB
K10	-.40**

\*\*correlation is significant at 0.01 level (2-tailed)

Table 3 indicates that the significant mean difference on distress scale between men and women (t=2.09, p=0.04); this indicates that women lawyers reported higher distress than men colleagues. This table also indicates the non-significant mean differences on psychological well-being.

**Table 3: Mean, Standard Deviation, and t-values of Male and Female lawyers on Psychological Distress and Psychological well-being (N=110)**

Scales	Male (n=55)		Female (n=55)		t	p	95% CI		Cohens' d
	M	SD	M	SD			LL	UL	
K10	32.29	7.60	36.54	5.73	2.09	0.04	-6.08	-1.12	.43
PWB	149.8	29.75	148.3	29.7	.25	.80	-10.5	13.60	.02

Note: CI=confidence interval; LL=lower limit; UL=upper limit

**Discussion**

This research examined the relationship of psychological distress and psychological well-being among lawyers. A sample of (N=110) licensed lawyers of high court 'Islamabad settled in Rawalpindi and Islamabad was selected by using the purposive sampling technique. Descriptive analysis findings confirmed that data is normally distributed and both scales were reliable.<sup>12</sup> Correlational analysis findings showed the negative association between psychological distress and psychological well-being; that means those lawyers had distress they had poor or lower well-being. Hypothesis of the study was approved and related with previous literature prolonged distress can have a negative impact on an individual's mental and physical health<sup>13,14</sup> such distress prone to develop or increases the risks of heart disease, back pain, gastrointestinal disturbances, anxiety, and depression. Further, they highlighted the risky behaviors such as tobacco smoking, usage of excessive alcohol and skipping meals that leads to lower well-being.

Results regarding gender indicated that there were significant mean differences on psychological distress among male and female lawyers. This result is consistent with previous findings in which legal researcher found that women practitioners had

higher distress as compared to men because they had extra burden at home and emotional that's why they can easily got stressed.<sup>15</sup> Moreover, the findings also indicated the non-significant mean differences on psychological wellbeing among male and female lawyers. However, mean differences shows that male lawyers had better psychological wellbeing than female lawyers. These results are consistent the previous literature, which suggested that male lawyers are more emotionally and professionally stable than female lawyers. This stability enhance their wellbeing. Yet, it does not mean that male lawyers experienced no psychological distress (commitment pressure and professional burnout). The reasons behind this differences is their coping skills and professional support from colleagues.<sup>16</sup>

As far as the positive outcomes of the study in law profession; there were some limitations which should be addressed for future research works. Time period was short and that is why sample size was limited. It was a cross sectional study and limited to twin cities. So in that context some recommendations are; there should be accurate time limit and longitudinal study will conduct in future. Sample size should be increased for generalization. Other cultures also include for detailed information. Law profession is central for society and for the welfare of human being. There is a great necessity to look for lawyer's problems in their profession as they play a vital role in our many societal issues.

**Conclusion**

This study's results proved that psychological distress (depression, anxiety and stress) and psychological wellbeing are negative linked with each other. This means when a person experienced a high level of psychological distress he or she will feel less psychological wellbeing. In this current study, findings suggested that female lawyers experiences more psychological distress than their male counterparts. This high level of psychological distress later on effect their wellbeing very badly.

**Limitations**

Just like other survey researches, this research has some limitations. The first limitation is the sample of the study was only taken from the twin cities licensed lawyers. Therefore, results of study cab be generalized if in future sample of lawyers from other

cities will be part of study. Another limitation is the use of self-report measures; future researchers should other than self-report measures.

### Implications

This study has vital implication in academic and practical setting. On the one side it provide a theoretical addition in literature on the sample of lawyers. On other side, it would provide help to counselors and psychologist so that they can not only pay attention to factors or problem related to this professions but also introduced some training or intervention that can help lawyer to reduce their psychological distress and boost their psychological wellbeing. Study will also provide guidance for future law students to prepare themselves for the demands or challenges of their career.

### REFERENCES

1. Port DR. Lawyers weigh in: Why is there a depression epidemic in the profession? American Bar Association. 2018.
2. ABA, Hazelden Betty Ford Foundation. First national study on attorney substance use, mental health concerns. Journal of Addiction Medicine. 2016.
3. Mirowsky J, Ross CE. Depression, parenthood, and age at first birth. *Social Science and Medicine*. 2002; 54: 1281-98.
4. Cooper CL, Marshall J. Occupational sources of stress: a review of the literature relating to coronary heart disease and mental ill health. *Journal of Occupational Psychology*. 1976; 49: 11-28.
5. Ryff CD. Eudaimonic well-being and health: Mapping consequences of self-realization. 2013.
6. Ryff CD. Happiness is everything, or is it? Explorations on the meaning of Psychological well-being. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*. 1989; 57: 1069-81.
7. Elwork A, Andrew G, Benjamin H. Lawyers in distress. *The Journal of Psychiatry and Law*. 1995; 23: 205-29.
8. Hasnain N, Naz I, Bano S. Stress and well-being of lawyers. *Journal of the Indian Academy of Applied Psychology*. 2010; 36: 165-8.
9. Skead NK, Rogers SL, Doraisamy J. Looking beyond the mirror: Psychological distress; disordered eating, weight and shape concerns; and maladaptive eating habits in lawyers and law students. *Int J Law Psychiatry*. 2018; 61: 90-102.
10. Anker J, Krill PR. Stress, drink, leave: An examination of gender-specific risk factors for mental health problems and attrition among licensed attorneys. *PLoS One*. 2021; 16: e0250563.
11. Hassan S, Husain W. The different levels of depression and anxiety among Pakistani professionals. *Insights Depress Anxiety*. 2020; 4: 012-8.
12. Kessler RC, Andrews G, Colpe LJ, Hiripi E, Mroczek DK, Normand SL, et al. Short screening scales to monitor population prevalence and trends in non-specific psychological distress. *Psychological Medicine*. 2002; 32: 959-6.
13. Nunnally JC, Bernstein IH. The assessment of reliability. *Psychometric Theory*. 1994; 3: 248-92.
14. Health and Safety Executive. *Tackling Work-related Stress*, HSE Books, London. 2001.
15. Cooper CL, Dewe PJ, O'Driscoll MP. *Organizational stress: A review and critique of theory, research and applications*. Sage Publications, CA. 2001.
16. Shete AN, Garkal KD. Legally unhappy: Psychological distress in legal practitioners. *Journal of Dental and Medical Sciences (IOSR-JDMS)*. 2016; 15: 129-32.