

**EFFECTS OF TRAUMATISING COURT CASES ON SECONDARY TRAUMATIC  
STRESS LEVELS AMONG JUDICIAL OFFICERS IN RIFT VALLEY, KENYA: AN  
UPSHOT OF PERSONAL AND CASE CHARACTERISTICS**

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## ABSTRACT

The Judiciary as one of the three arms of Kenyan Government is responsible for fair and efficient administration of justice, safeguarding individual rights and freedoms as well as acting as a check on the other arms of Government and also the promotion of socio-economic progress through jurisprudence. Officers working in the judiciary encounter clients whose rights may have been violated and who vividly narrate stories that bear content of trauma. Due to adjudication of cases involving such clients, the officers may get vicariously traumatised and hence suffer secondary traumatic stress (STS), which may generate arousal, avoidance and intrusive behavioural tendencies. This scenario, if unaddressed, may impact negatively on judicial officers' capacity to execute their duties effectively. In this regard, this study was set to find out the extent to which Kenya's judicial officers handling traumatised clients were experiencing STS and the degree to which this psychological condition was related to personal characteristics (i.e., gender, age, and work experience) and characteristics of traumatised clients' court cases. The study was guided by Constructive Self Development Theory and Stress Process Framework Model. Using *ex-post facto* research design, data was collected from 83 judicial officers in Rift Valley region, Kenya, through a self-administered questionnaire. Collected data was analysed through frequency counts and percentages with respect to nominal scale data while ordinal scale data was analysed by use of inferential statistics, specifically *t*-test, one way ANOVA, and chi square ( $\chi^2$ ) tests at .05 alpha levels. Analysis task was accomplished through the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) programme, version 22.0. The key findings of the study were that respondents' STS level was moderately low. Female respondents' level of STS was higher than that of their male counterparts. However, this gender difference in STS level was statistically insignificant ( $p > .05$ ). Additionally, STS level increased with respondents' age and work experience though it appeared to decline beyond 50 years of age and 25 years of work experience respectively. The relationship between traumatising court case characteristics and level of STS was also positive and statistically significant ( $p < .05$ ) with child defilement, rape and robbery with violence cases appearing to generate high STS among respondents compared with cases relating to, for example, police injustices to litigants, matrimonial instabilities and accidents. The study also revealed that the most prevalent STS symptoms were those relating to intrusive STS domain while the least were those linked to arousal domain. STS, the study further revealed, among respondents can be mitigated through counselling and debriefing of officers, in addition to encouraging them to join social groups such as sports clubs. The study offers useful insights to Judicial Service Commission (JSC). For instance, the commission can borrow useful ideas relating to how it can enhance judicial officers' capacity to manage STS through well managed counselling programmes. Finally, scholars in the counselling field may identify investigation pathways they can follow with a view to not only improving STS coping capacity among judicial officers but also unearthing other STS related challenges they could be encountering in the course of justice delivery within and outside Kenya.