

Preparing for Law: Managing Stress in High School Mock Trial

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ABSTRACT

The legal profession in the United States stands at a critical juncture, grappling with a profound mental health crisis among its practitioners. Lawyers face significant obstacles to their mental health and well-being, exacerbated by their high-stress careers. Dinovitzer et al. (2004) highlighted the long work hours along with pressure to perform and triumph in legal cases (Dinovitzer et al., 2004). This career style, common among various legal specializations, contributes to stress and its associated effects in the legal community. Krause and Chong (2019) documented a surge in mental-health-related tragedies among American legal practitioners, with suicides and drug overdoses increasing in frequency (Krause & Chong, 2019). These concerning trends emphasize the urgent need for effective strategies to address mental health challenges in the legal field. Meanwhile, high school Mock Trial programs serve as microcosms of the legal profession. Karraker (1993) explained that like their professional counterparts, Mock Trial participants confront stressors inherent to the legal process (Karraker, 1993). Students simulate legal proceedings in a courtroom setting; the pressure of performing at this level can be taxing. Their confidence, legal knowledge, and ability to think critically are tested as they argue in favor of or against court cases. By evaluating stress management strategies in the context of high school Mock Trial, the researcher aims to determine the efficacy of various coping mechanisms to combat stress, ultimately assessing which one is the most effective. The resultant insights may support the well-being of not only Mock Trial participants but also aspiring legal professionals.

Literature Review

Across the United States, lawyers experience frequent challenges to their mental well-being. A major correlated factor is the highly stressful nature of a law career. Attorneys typically work upwards of 60 hours per week, with newer attorneys working even longer (Dinovitzer et al., 2004). Legal responsibilities can be challenging and place high pressures on lawyers. This style of work is common to many types of lawyers, from criminal to corporate (Dinovitzer et al., 2004). Thus, mitigating the associated consequences of a legal career should be a priority for most, if not all, legal professionals.

Definitions

There are several definitions that must first be established. Fink (2010) defined *stress* as a fight-or-flight reaction in response to perceived threats, resulting in “anxiety...emotional tension, and difficulty in adjustment” (Fink, 2010). Galderisi et al. (2015) categorize mental health as a “state of well-being” in which people realize their own capabilities, can cope with “the stresses of life”, and “work productively and fruitfully” (Galderisi et al., 2015). Mental health is more than the state of one’s mind: it extends to emotional well-being and practical functionality too. The researcher therefore interprets mental health as not only well-being but the ability to handle day-to-day stressors and contribute to society.

Significance

The possible side effects of demanding legal careers are evident. American lawyers frequently deal with depression, anxiety, and substance abuse (Krause and Chong, 2019). Statistically, they suffer from substance abuse at a much higher level than their counterparts in different professional careers. Problem drinking in the legal field (21% of practicing lawyers) is nearly double the 12% rate for other highly educated professions such as doctors (Krill et al., 2016). The American Bar Association's Survey of law (2020) corroborated this, finding that 43% of law students binge drank at least once in the two weeks prior to the survey (Survey of law, 2020). Such problems take root early on (Survey of law, 2020), asserting themselves as a prevalent component of American legal culture.

This also damages the quality of lawyers' service: they are much less able to serve their clients' interests. Rule 1.1 of the American Bar Association's rules of professional conduct emphasizes that lawyers must competently represent their clients (Rule 1.1). Lawyers' declining mental health may affect their clients, employers, and larger society.

With this in mind, it is crucial to mitigate these problems early on. By equipping lawyers with the tools to manage these challenges as soon as possible, legal organizations can work to lessen the severity of their impacts and teach lawyers skills to use in future stressful situations.

Previous Solutions

Gordon and Dionesse (2015) advocated for meditation as a way to lessen the negative effects on lawyers' well-being (Gordon & Dionesse, 2015). Scott (2017) similarly supported this view, commending the increased focus and concentration that came with meditation (Scott, 2017). Indeed, meditation is gaining traction as a coping method. Yale Law School, for instance, has implemented meditation and mindfulness classes into its law curriculum (Gordon & Dionesse, 2015). Nauman (2014) concurred with the work of the aforementioned scholars, concluding that mindfulness was an effective approach (Nauman, 2014).

Cohen and Sherman (2014), on the other hand, found engaging in positive self-talk a useful alternative (Cohen & Sherman, 2014). Simultaneously, Penno et al. (2022) deemed that goal-setting was also successful in assisting lawyers struggling with mental health (Penno et al., 2022). Finally, Colder Carras et al. (2018) lauded minor distraction, the act of intentionally distracting oneself from a stressful situation, as a "personal medicine" that could be used to adapt to stress (Colder Carras et al., 2018).

Barriers

Despite these attempts, lawyers often remain unable or unwilling to seek help. It can be difficult to determine which lawyers are in need of assistance. Lawyers may choose not to seek aid even when they need it; they may believe that their schedules are too busy, feel a sense of isolation or shame, or simply be afraid of confronting the social stigma associated with mental health problems (Gordon & Dionesse, 2015). Pescosolido (2013) built on this by explaining how those who speak out about their struggles are often seen as tainted and weak (Pescosolido, 2013). In a field where maintaining a professional image is crucial, lawyers encounter pressure to stay silent. Once one becomes accustomed to this practice, it may be difficult to escape. Teaching lawyers the skills to combat these issues on their own as early on as possible is of the utmost urgency.

Addressing the Gap

While a multitude of common adaptive strategies has been evaluated separately, no studies have compared these methods to one another. Previous scholars have only focused on individual strategies instead of drawing any comparison between them, leaving lawyers with no clear suggestion on which is the most effective. Given the limited time and energy of legal professionals, most would likely be unable to spend extra effort exploring and experimenting with methods themselves. This raises questions as to which strategy is the most likely to benefit lawyers. The researcher aims to fill this gap by implementing five common strategies side by side, followed by an evaluation of each one's efficacy.

Similarity to Mock Trial

High school Mock Trial programs are similar to professional law practice in many ways. Students simulate case trials in-court with eponymous 'mock trials', representing roles such as attorneys, witnesses, and jury members. Participants, representing prosecution or defense (criminal cases) or plaintiff or defendant (civil cases) compete against teams from other schools representing the corresponding opponents. Rounds are evaluated by professional judges.

Mock Trial teaches participants to hone their skills of critical thinking and argument (Karraker, 1993), highly beneficial skills in the courtroom. Rosenberg et al. (2018) also explained that mock trials are frequently used to educate students in law school (Rosenberg et al., 2018). Bengtson and Sifford (2010) expanded on this by specifying that Mock Trial is used with pre-law students for hands-on experience of what a lawyer's job is like (Bengtson & Sifford, 2010). As Herron et al. (n.d.) attested to, navigating the "adversarial nature" of the courtroom is a valuable learning opportunity reminiscent of professional law (Herron et al., n.d.). Therefore, addressing Mock-Trial related stressors among high school students may provide lawyers with a map to counter similar stressors in the professional world.

This literature review highlighted the pressing need to identify the most effective stress management strategy for lawyers given the prevalence of mental health issues in the field. To answer the research question, "Which commonly evaluated stress management strategy is the most effective intervention to support well-being in high school Mock Trial?" the researcher compared challenges presented by high school Mock Trial programs and professional legal practice, emphasizing the relevance of stress-management strategies in both situations.

Methods

The researcher used a quasi-experimental design to answer the research question, "Which commonly evaluated stress management strategy is the most effective intervention to support lawyer well-being?". Mock Trial members and professional lawyers encounter many of the same obstacles, such as a heavy workload and intense time commitment (Bengtson & Sifford, 2010). In both cases, stressors such as anxiety, discomfort or emotional tension are frequently prompted (Fink, 2010). Consequently, the researcher conducted her study with Mock Trial members at █████ High School in New Jersey.

The researcher experimented with participants by testing out a different coping strategy each meeting, repeating this over several months. Prior to the start of meetings, respondents completed a "pre-meeting questionnaire" about stress levels and relevant issues. The researcher then carried out a chosen strategy. After the strategy was tested, participants answered a "post-meeting questionnaire" explaining their new stress levels and relevant issues. At the end of the competition season, a "post-season questionnaire" was administered to monitor for consistency and fluctuations in ratings.

Data was analyzed by separately determining the efficacy of each method based on participant ratings on a scale of 1-10 after experiencing the method during meetings, with 10 being the most effective. Scores were averaged for each strategy. The mean score for each strategy was then compared with the others, investigating which method yielded the highest success rate out of 10. The researcher compared widely utilized strategies that had been evaluated by other scholars, as discussed in the literature review. This aligned with the research inquiry since the goal of the study was to determine the most commonly effective way of handling Mock Trial stress.

Adaptation from Existing Instruments

The environment in which Mock Trial meetings took place impacted the nature of the survey instruments. Measuring stress levels through physiological signs would have required use of time-consuming medical means. This was simply not viable during busy, hectic Mock Trial meetings without significant disruption to typical meeting activities, thereby undermining the purpose of determining stress levels and factors in authentic Mock Trial situations. Survey instruments were therefore modeled on the general structure of the Perceived Stress Scale (PSS).

The State of New Hampshire (1983) explained that the PSS is a commonly used psychological instrument to measure and analyze perceived stress (State of New Hampshire, 1983). Participants answer questions regarding different reactions to stress and assign each response a value on a scale of 1-4, with 4 indicating that a reaction occurs very often. Afterwards, participants reverse their scores for specific questions and determine new values as directed by PSS instructions: for instance, for four questions from the survey, an original score of 0 now equals 4, 1 equals 3, 2 equals 2, and so on (State of New Hampshire, 1983). Participants then add up the scores for each question (with the changed scores for the four specified questions in the PSS) and check their total score for perceived stress. Totals from 0-13 indicate low stress, 14-26 indicate moderate stress, and 27-40 demonstrate high stress (State of New Hampshire, 1983).

The researcher made several changes to this base structure. First, the scale was expanded to range from 1-10, with 10 representing the highest level of stress. This was done to allow participants a wider range of possible responses to express their stress. Second, instead of reversing numerical ratings for certain questions and adding scores up, scores were averaged and divided into three categories based on the 1-10 scale: a mean score between 1-4 signaled moderate stress; 5 indicated neutral stress, and 6-10 represented high stress. The reasoning and implications of this decision will be thoroughly addressed in the limitations section of this paper.

Description of Participants and Methodology

The researcher worked with the [REDACTED] High School Mock Trial team, composed of students ranging from fourteen to eighteen years old in age. Subjects spanned all genders, races and ethnicities. Data collection took place during Mock Trial meetings.

The researcher utilized a quasi-experimental research design, relying on a mixture of qualitative and quantitative data collection. Participants gave qualitative data through providing a description of their own experiences, while quantitative data was collected through confining responses to one answer on the 1-10 scale and investigating the averages of participant responses there. This mixed-method approach allowed for consideration of both individual participant experiences and a broader numerical analysis of data. This was used instead of a purely experimental approach since the tested strategies were already stipulated in the existing body of knowledge to be commonly effective approaches; the goal was to isolate the *most* effective among them so results would illustrate the “best of the best” methods to combat stress.

Alignment

Since Mock Trial members face many of the same stressors as professional lawyers (Herron et al., n.d.), study results were cautiously applied to the American lawyer population. The research design provided a direct focus on the gap in the existing body of knowledge: previously, the efficacy of various strategies for managing stress had not been compared, even though strategies had been examined on their own.

Instruments and Procedures

First, a quantitative, pre-meeting questionnaire determined the prior knowledge students had about stress in the context of Mock Trial. Students were questioned on what parts of Mock Trial they felt to be personally stressful, such as reading and memorizing case material or balancing Mock Trial with other activities. The researcher then tested different coping mechanisms to stressors over the months-long course of the competition season.

After each meeting, the researcher conducted a post-meeting questionnaire where participants assigned ratings on a scale of 1-10 of how helpful a tested strategy was. Over a period of several months, five stress management strategies were explored: mindfulness, positive affirmations, minor distractions, goal setting, and “talking it out”. Kristeller et al. (2007) established that mindfulness is a larger subject of which meditation is a subcategory of (Kristeller et al., 2007). Therefore, mindfulness and meditation were combined into one strategy for this study, referred to as mindfulness. “Talking it out” was incorporated after the researcher observed participants frequently discussing case material with one another to relieve stress.

After collecting data, the researcher examined the averages of participant ratings on the 1-10 scale for each strategy. The effectiveness of these strategies was then ranked; strategies with higher mean scores received higher rankings.

Finally, a post-season questionnaire was conducted after the competition season. The researcher sought to identify consistency in strategy efficacy or lack thereof; this questionnaire enabled the researcher to investigate changes in the efficacy of different strategies and how ratings fluctuated as the season progressed.

Ethical Considerations

The researcher’s methods ensured an ethical research process. The study was vetted and approved by the school’s Institutional Review Board (IRB); the researcher obtained informed consent through parent and student forms based on Smith College’s consent form templates (Smith College). that were reviewed by the IRB as well as her research instructors. Questionnaires allowed for respondent confidentiality, while experimentation occurred in a friendly, familiar, and supportive environment. No collected information was distributed. The records were stored in a password-protected Google Drive that only the instructor and the researcher could access; three years after the final date of data collection, they will be destroyed.

Data Collected

Data was generated using questionnaires distributed online through Google Forms. First, the researcher experimented with various stress-managing strategies with participants. Participants then rated the efficacy of these strategies on a scale of 1-10, with 10 being the most effective. Also studied was the extent of education students received regarding these problems, stress levels before and after using different coping strategies, and student evaluations of different strategies’ effectiveness for managing Mock Trial work.

Bias and Validity

The researcher was a student leader on the Mock Trial team, so personal familiarity with team members may have influenced data (but the researcher was sure to emphasize this in the limitations section). Since social stigma continues to surround stress (Pescosolido, 2013), the researcher hoped that her officer status could serve as a beneficial counter to this. As she was close with participants, they may have been more willing to answer to the best of their ability.

There was also a challenge to external validity: the target population for the study was American lawyers, but the accessible population was the [REDACTED] High School Mock Trial team. The researcher aimed to maximize the validity of study results and overcome these obstacles by using various forms of research validity. The study considered participants' evaluations of which methods were most effective (respondent validity) and the researcher conducted a numerical analysis of results (quantitative validity).

Results

To answer the question, "Which commonly evaluated stress management strategy is the most effective intervention to support lawyer well-being?" analyses were conducted regarding participants' stress levels before and after meetings, Mock-Trial-relevant factors that contributed to these, and participant perceptions of various stress management techniques.

Stress Levels Prior to Meetings

The mean stress rating recorded *prior* to attending Mock Trial meetings was 5.6 out of 10. Participants spent an average of 1.7 hours preparing for each meeting, typically rating their satisfaction with preparations between 7 and 10.

Methods of Combating Stress Prior to Meetings

79% of participants did not use any strategy on their own to handle stress, but the remaining respondents cited mindfulness and minor distractions. *Every single participant* reported that they had never been taught stress management techniques during Mock Trial, law classes, or other law-related programs geared towards high school students. This highlighted an alarming lack of educational curricula pertaining to handling law-related stress.

Team Dynamic: Encouragement and Improvement

All participants believed they received adequate support from the team. However, several called attention to specific areas for improvement: skillfully representing their witness or attorney roles in courtrooms, maintaining more authentic demeanors during competitions, building up confidence, and thinking on the spot more effectively to encounter opponents' arguments. Others outlined logistic goals, including wanting to see more dedication from younger members of the team, participating in more competition rounds and opportunities, and making communications between team members smoother.

Stress: Levels and Actual Contributory Factors After Meetings

After reflecting on their personal stress levels upon the conclusion of Mock Trial meetings, it was found that the average stress rating had risen to 6.6, an increase of 1 unit from the pre-meeting average of 5.6. However, the average stress score was in this case an inaccurate representation of the true change in participants' ratings (see Figure 1).

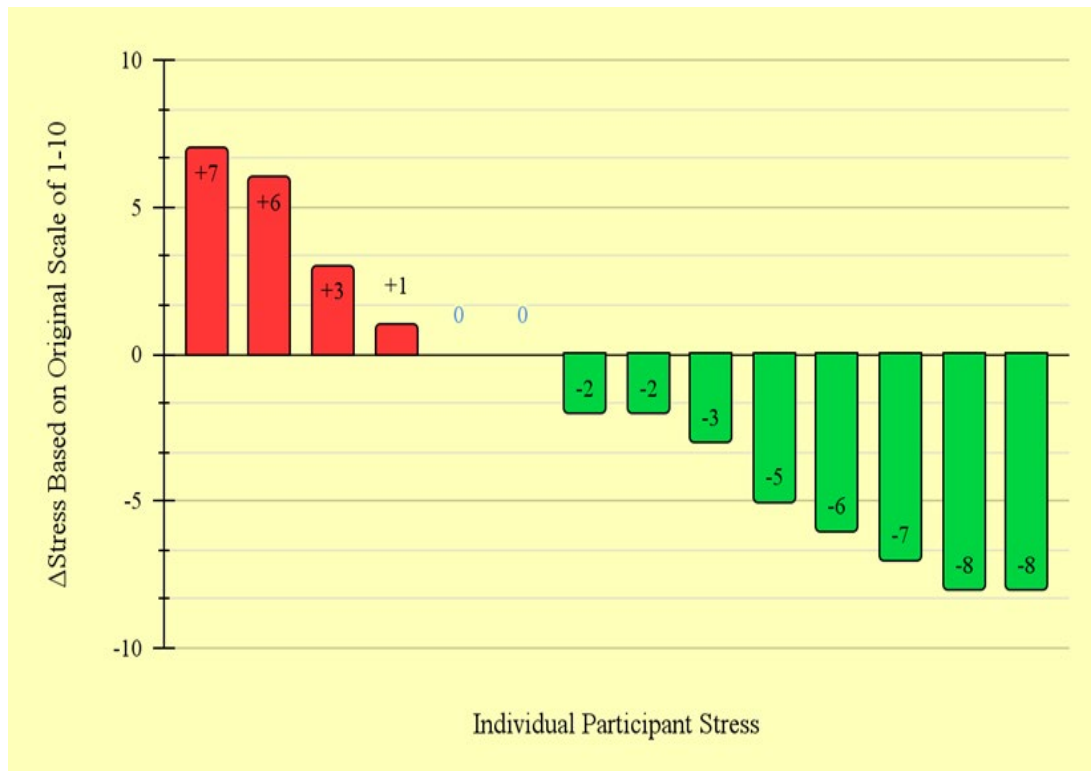


Figure 1.

Change in Individual Participant Stress Levels After Meeting from Stress Levels Before Meeting

Note. Figure 1 shows the change in stress levels for each participant before and after Mock Trial meetings. Red bars indicate increases in stress levels, while green bars indicate decreases. Blue text represents no change.

As demonstrated by Figure 1, four participants reported a positive increase in stress. Two experienced no change in stress levels, while the remaining eight participants actually underwent decreases in stress levels. Thus, nearly 60% of participants experienced decreases in their stress levels after using the five strategies tested.

Meanwhile, participants found the most stressful aspect of Mock Trial meetings to be rehearsing in front of others (43%), followed by managing time effectively, meeting with attorney coaches, revising case strategies, and memorizing case material at 14% each.

Methods of Combating Stress After Meetings

Overall, the strategy of mindfulness was deemed the most effective by participants, with an average helpfulness of 7.4 on a scale of 1 to 10. Mindfulness was followed by “talking it out” (7), minor distraction (6.5), goal setting (6.3), and positive self-talk and affirmations (5.6).

Most Effective Strategy Overall: Highest Probability of Future Participant Usage

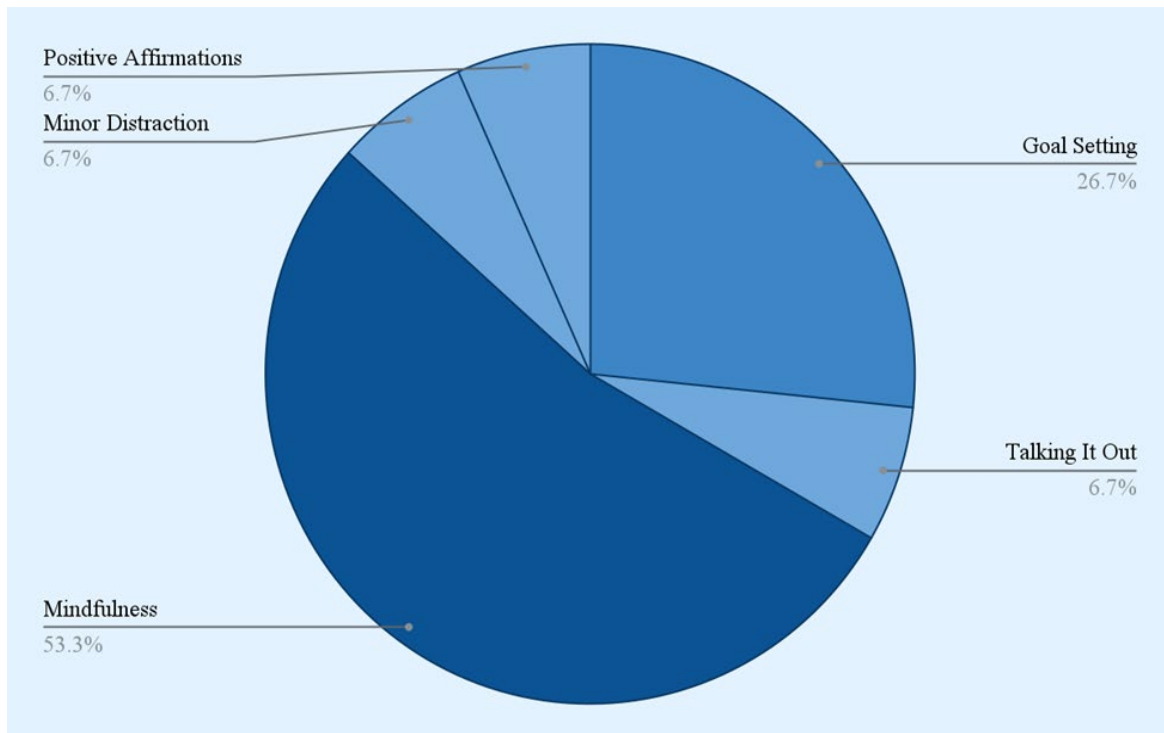


Figure 2.

Most Likely Strategy Participants Will Use to Manage Future Stress

Note. Figure 2 represents the strategies participants see the highest likelihood of themselves using in similar situations with similar stressors.

Ultimately, mindfulness prevailed, with 53.3% of participants saying they were most likely to utilize mindfulness in similar stressful situations. The second largest portion of the pie chart above covers goal setting, with 26.7% of participants seeing the highest probability of using goal setting to reduce the impacts of stress in similar situations. These were in turn followed by minor distraction, positive affirmations, and “talking it out”, with 6.7% of participants favoring each.

Discussion

These results illuminate the frequency, severity, and contributory factors of stress experienced by █████ High School students in Mock Trial, as well as the most useful ways to counter the stress’ negative effects. They provide a preliminary answer to the research question, “Which commonly evaluated stress management strategy is the most effective intervention to support lawyer well-being?”.

Personal Stress Management and Stress Prior to Meetings

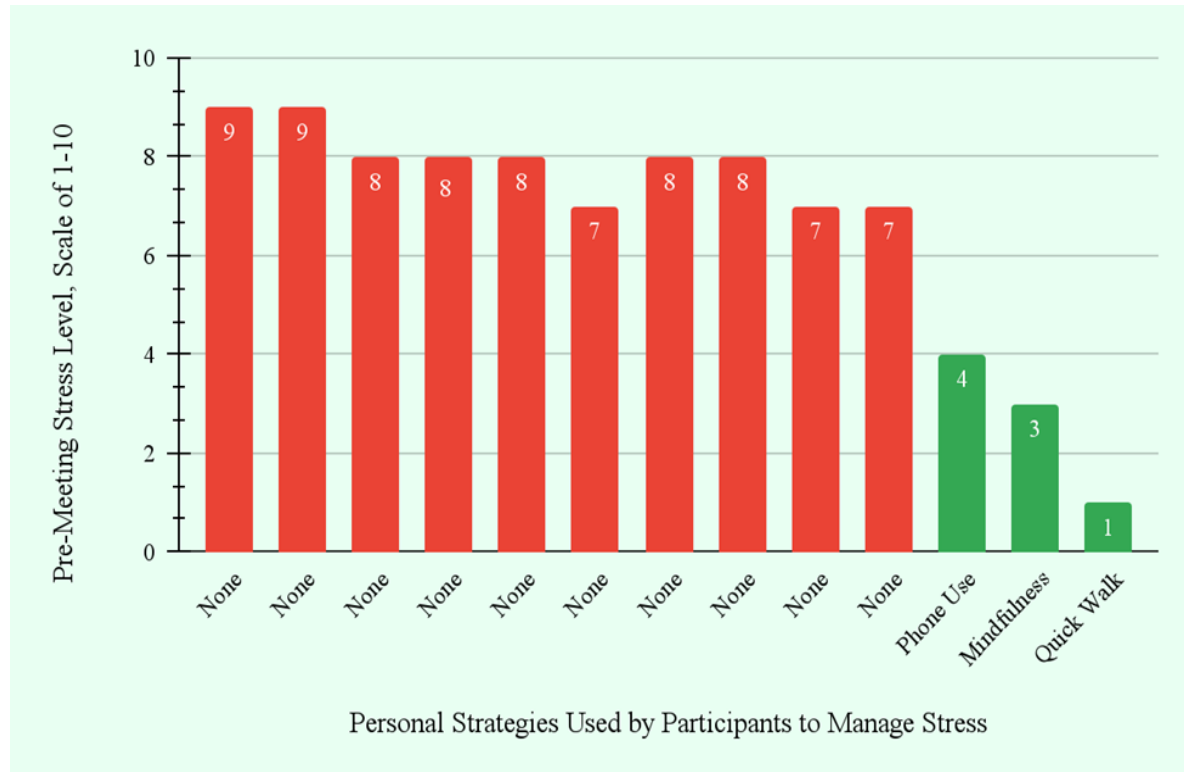


Figure 3.

Pre-Meeting Stress Levels and Personal Strategies Participants Used to Manage Stress

Note. Each bar represents data for an individual participant. A score of 5 is designated as a neutral stress level, while 6-10 is considered relatively high and 1-4 relatively low.

Although a majority of participants did not personally use strategies to mitigate and reduce the stress they experienced related to Mock Trial, those that did experienced lower levels of stress prior to meetings, as evidenced by Figure 3. These methods included mindfulness, briefly using a personal smartphone, and taking walks (the latter two both categorized as minor distraction). All participants who used a stress management strategy on their own time exhibited lower levels of stress before meeting.

This indicates a possible relationship between participants who used personal stress management strategies and their pre-meeting stress levels. As shown in Figure 3, participants who actively used methods such as mindfulness and minor distraction tended to experience lower levels of stress before meetings. Consequently, encouraging students to adopt stress techniques on their own could lower pre-meeting stress levels.

The above data suggests a relationship between how individuals cope with stress and the intensity of the stress they experience in Mock Trial. This implies a possible feedback loop where taking advantage of effective stress management methods may lead to reduced stress levels, which in turn may reinforce the use of these strategies in future high-stress situations.

Among the five methods tested, mindfulness was the most likely strategy to be employed by participants in similar future situations. The high percentage of participants who preferred mindfulness illustrates its efficacy in healthily responding to stressors inherent to Mock Trial meetings and competitions. In this study, therefore, mindfulness emerged as the most effective strategy for participants to manage Mock Trial stress. This

complements the fact that the greatest portion of scholarly works examined in the literature review commended mindfulness as a strategy.

Limitations

There were several limitations throughout the process of answering the research question, “Which commonly evaluated stress management strategy is the most effective intervention to support lawyer well-being?”. Due to the researcher’s status as an officer on the Mock Trial team, the probable presence of bias within participant responses was a key limitation. Data may have been influenced as a result of the researcher’s personal familiarity with each participant. Brutus et al. (2012) emphasized the need for readers to interpret results with consideration of the consequences of these limitations (Brutus et al., 2012). Fortunately, this limitation could have positively affected the results’ authenticity. With the knowledge that the researcher was a companion who had been through the same Mock Trial events and could likely understand common struggles, respondents may have had a better incentive to answer to the best of their ability.

The study also involved 14 participants at one single school. While this on its own is too small for a definite conclusion, the study population was limited to Mock Trial members instead of the general student population at ██████ High School due to the specific similarities they shared with professional lawyers. The team had 20 members total; 14 out of 20 members participating in the questionnaire meant 70% of the population was studied. Using the remaining members as a control group was considered, but a) the remaining members did not give their consent, and b) the population was small to begin with and a 6-member control group may not have yielded the most valid results. Therefore, the researcher did not examine the entire suburban high school Mock Trial population.

Another limitation rested on the fact that questionnaires depended on participant perception. Many aspects of the instruments relied on self-reported data. One topic merited particular scrutiny: individually perceived influences on Mock-Trial-centered stress. Whether due to a lack of awareness or negligence, participants themselves may not have supplied the true contributory factors to their stress. This concept—defined by Razavi (2001) as systematic response distortion, where one’s perceptions are inaccurate in the context of the larger situation—is a common issue when examining occupational stress (Razavi, 2001). Since it is generally likely that human perception does not always provide an accurate understanding of the truth, this could have potentially produced ‘distractor’ data that masked the actual underlying components of Mock-Trial-focused stress.

The final issue of note is that although a scale similar to PSS was implemented, questions were posed and scaled differently from the PSS model to ensure greater clarity for participants when selecting their responses. Strict conformation to PSS features uniformly structured questions—all phrased in either the affirmative or the negative—which in turn enables researchers to use a consistent method of assigning a point value from 0-4 based on responses to each question. By contrast, all questionnaire questions in this study that involved scaling were based on a more expansive scale of 1-10 to account for nuances in perception of stress. They also varied in terms of affirmative, neutral, or negative phrasing. The less inclusive 0-4 points system found in PSS could not be standardized to definitively indicate the same stress ranges as the findings in this study if it were applied, since it allowed for significantly fewer possible answers from participants. Thus, the questionnaire stress average may deviate from the PSS stress average if the narrower range of possible answers associated with PSS were used instead. As the PSS is the more widely accepted approach, disparities could raise questions regarding the validity of the implemented questionnaire’s findings. Conducting a rigorous PSS analysis of stress level data would serve as a more solid confirmation of the relevant results or a call for further investigation, likely with the use of other existing methods of analysis to probe any discrepancies.

Conclusion

This study sought to answer the research question, “Which commonly evaluated stress management strategy is the most effective intervention to support lawyer well-being?”. The prevalence of stress among study participants shows the importance of promoting stress management strategies in Mock Trial and similar settings. This study delved into the stress levels of students at ██████ High School in the context of participating on the school Mock Trial team.

After initial evaluation of stress levels, further analysis was conducted to inspect factors playing a part in stress, strategies applied to cope with stress, and areas of improvement within the team dynamics. Results indicated that the average participant stress level saw a marginal increase after meetings, with rehearsing in front of others designated as the most stressful part of the experience. However, when reviewed holistically, the majority of participants experienced a decrease in stress levels after working with stress-management interventions. Mindfulness in particular emerged as the method judged to be the most effective. There was also a notable correlation between personal use of stress management strategies and lower stress levels before engaging in Mock Trial activities: participants who actively engaged in strategies on their own time to counter stress demonstrated lower stress levels prior to meetings compared to those who did not.

Implications

Thorough examination of the challenges posed by stress to students on the ██████ High School Mock Trial team offers insight into areas for improvement. Promoting stress-management strategies, especially mindfulness, during team meetings and encouraging students to integrate such methods into their daily lives can enhance well-being and performance in the courtroom. In addition, rectifying common issues within teams, such as time management and courtroom confidence, can help lead to more favorable competition outcomes and effective preparation for future endeavors in Mock Trial and similar situations.

Educators and team advisors should take advantage of the experimental techniques tested, particularly mindfulness (due to its status as the most likely strategy to resonate with students), in such curricula to not only improve student livelihoods but cultivate team success as well. Being equipped with the skills to mitigate challenges presented by stress could make a crucial difference in courtroom performance. At the same time, participant-identified areas for improvement within the team (enhancing courtroom confidence, maintaining authenticity, and managing time more effectively) call attention to the necessity of more targeted skill development in Mock Trial. A combination of skill-specific lessons in Mock Trial teams and implementation of the most useful stress management techniques is likely to spur students and teams towards greater success.

As previously established, there are a multitude of similarities between Mock Trial and the professional legal field regarding general challenges and skills required for success; mock trials are frequently used to educate those interested in law, particularly students in law school (Rosenberg et al., 2018). It follows that these conclusions can be tentatively applied towards law students and practitioners. To reiterate, typical shared similarities include the pressure of courtroom appearances, the need for effective case preparation, and the demand for quick thinking and adaptability in response to opposing arguments, among others. Just as stress management techniques were found to benefit ██████ high school students in Mock Trial, they may also be valuable for those in the legal field. Techniques such as mindfulness, which emerged as an effective strategy in the study, could help individuals involved with law cope with the demands and pressures of their work. Utilizing such strategies could support lawyer well-being. This in turn could contribute to improved outcomes in legal practice, including more skillful representation of clients and enhanced courtroom performance. Of course, further research is crucial to a) develop a more comprehensive understanding of stress in high school Mock Trial and b) determine whether these findings are truly applicable to professional law.

Call for Further Research

There are several suggestions the researcher proposes as to how others wishing to build on these findings should proceed. First, future researchers could explore a broader range of procedures to manage stress, potentially discovering approaches equal to or more effective than mindfulness. Moreover, they should replicate the study but survey a greater number of participants and utilize a control group to monitor stress levels *without* interventions. This could either bolster or subvert the idea of mindfulness as the most successful tactic based on participant ratings. After all, while 53.3% of participants in the study indicated that they found mindfulness the most effective, this is not an extremely large majority. A larger sample size might generate an even more conclusive statistic, whether it be in favor or opposition of mindfulness as the best strategy. Future researchers could also make exact use of the PSS in their inquiries in order to align results with the general understanding of stress in academia, as previously mentioned.

Scholars ought to consider testing chosen stress management strategies across more diverse samples or groups. Doing so would enable researchers to conclusively extend findings to larger populations and settings. This could be accomplished through longitudinal studies. Caruana et al. (2015) reported that such studies track participants over prolonged time periods, noting that the longitudinal approach is particularly helpful when appraising the results of different treatments for physical ailments (Caruana et al., 2015). Researchers could apply the same concept to this study by assessing the impacts of stress management interventions over a longer duration of time.

Finally, to better identify correlation between specific stressors and higher levels of stress in future studies, the researcher recommends examination of stress levels felt *during* engagement in those activities as opposed to before and after. Assuming the appropriate equipment is available, detailed physiological assessments of stress could prove an invaluable tool to further strengthen findings. Making these adjustments would direct scholars on the path towards a clearer “verdict” on stress in Mock Trial and how to best reduce it.

Acknowledgments

I would like to thank my advisor for the valuable insight provided to me on this topic.

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