

Report Reveals Solo Lawyers' Mental Health at Risk Due to Irregular Hours



The majority of solo lawyers want the flexibility to set their own hours, but working irregular and extended hours could negatively impact their mental health, according to Clio's 2023 Legal Trends for Solo Law Firms report. The report, published on April 18 by the practice management software company, was based on fresh data analysis from the 2022 Legal Trends Report. The data found that about one in five lawyers left their job as part of the "Great Resignation" or "Great Reshuffle," with better pay and work-life balance as their top priorities.

31% of lawyers who quit their law firms set up solo practices, according to the report, which surveyed 1,134 U.S. legal professionals, 458 U.S. non-legal professionals, and 1,168 U.S. consumers. Additionally, the report revealed that 62% of solo lawyers prefer working from home, 50% prefer to meet clients virtually, and 89% want to work outside typical workday hours.

However, the report suggests that irregular working hours negatively impact lawyers' mental health. While 81% of lawyers reported "positive mental and emotional wellness" when working regular hours, "nearly half of those working irregular schedules couldn't say the same," according to the report.

Joshua Lenon, a lawyer in residence at Clio, stated that there is a "huge disparity" between solo lawyers who work regular hours and those who work outside traditional workday hours. Lenon added that the administrative demands of running a solo firm and the additional roles that lawyers take on to develop and market their businesses add "unique stressors."

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Clio's report found that solos are as likely as lawyers working at larger firms to report working more than 40 hours per week, with more than half, or 54%, reporting working on Saturdays and 40% on Sundays. The report notes that although solos have the freedom to choose their own hours, they also want to live and enjoy their lives outside of work.

The report suggests that technology, including practice management software, addresses mental health and wellness by helping overburdened solos with scheduling, messaging, document management, and other tasks. "It just reduces a bit of the administrative burden that solo lawyers take upon themselves," Lenon says.

The report found that 85% of solo lawyers use cloud-based legal practice management software for their work, as opposed to 55% of lawyers who are not solo. Furthermore, since 2019, lawyers at larger firms have typically charged 20% more per hour than solos. Although solo lawyers have lower overhead costs, their realization rates are 1% to 3% lower than larger firms, and collection rates are 2% lower.

The report also states that hourly rates are rising for solos, but they "haven't kept pace with inflation," noting that for solos and larger firms to keep up, they would need to increase their rates by \$12 per hour.

In conclusion, the report suggests that although solos have the freedom to set their own hours, they need to be mindful of their mental health and well-being. Technology can play a significant role in helping solos manage their workload and reduce stress, but solos still need to find a healthy balance between work and personal life.