

## Study Reveals Ineffectiveness of Mental Health Initiatives in Addressing Stress and Anxiety Among Lawyers



Despite increased attention on mental health and well-being in the legal profession, a recent survey conducted by ALM and Law.com Compass reveals a concerning trend of growing stress, anxiety, and depression among lawyers. The survey, which included nearly 3,000 participants, paints a worrisome picture of the mental health challenges faced by legal professionals.

According to the American Lawyer, approximately 71% of respondents reported experiencing anxiety, marking a 5% increase compared to the previous year. Similarly, 38% of lawyers acknowledged dealing with depression, reflecting a substantial 35% rise from the previous year. The survey also indicated a significant surge in the number of lawyers grappling with other mental health issues, with figures more than doubling from nearly 15% to about 31% within a year.

The American Lawyer further delves into specific indicators of mental health challenges reported by lawyers. Over half of the respondents expressed feelings of failure, self-doubt, emotional detachment, increased cynicism, and reduced satisfaction and sense of accomplishment. Over 60% reported feeling overwhelmed, irritable, exhausted, or facing difficulties in concentration.

The study revealed that over three-quarters of lawyers attributed these problems to their work environment. Notably, 68% cited the pressures of meeting billable hour targets, 67% mentioned the inability to disconnect from work, and 54% identified lack of sleep as contributing factors. Additionally, 49% of lawyers believed that mental health problems and substance abuse had reached a crisis level within the legal profession, compared to 44% in the previous year.

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When asked about their comfort level in discussing mental health with on-site wellness professionals, approximately 51% of lawyers responded positively. However, only 33% believed they could take a leave of absence to address mental health or substance use issues.

Law firms have begun implementing various resources to address mental health concerns, such as mindfulness sessions, educational programs on exercise and nutrition, and access to therapy apps. Despite these efforts, lawyers still face barriers in seeking help due to the profession's culture of perfectionism and fear of negative career consequences.

Laura Mahr, a lawyer, mental health coach, and founder of Conscious Legal Minds, emphasized the challenge lawyers face in accessing mental health services. She highlighted the perceived threat of professional setbacks, such as missed promotions or job loss, when not always operating at peak performance. Mahr's work focuses on teaching lawyers techniques rooted in neurobiology and neuroscience to regulate their nervous systems, optimizing cognitive functioning and well-being.

Mental health professionals and consultants recommend establishing boundaries for lawyers' availability outside work hours and considering the inclusion of psychologists or other practitioners on law firm staff. These measures aim to create a supportive environment and provide timely assistance to legal professionals in need.

The survey findings highlight the concerning rise in stress, anxiety, and depression among lawyers, despite efforts to address mental health issues in the legal profession. The study emphasizes the urgent need for enhanced support and effective strategies to promote well-being, including fostering a culture that encourages open dialogue, setting boundaries, and providing accessible resources for mental health care. By prioritizing the mental well-being of lawyers, the legal profession can strive towards creating a healthier and more sustainable work environment.