

KENTUCKY PARTICIPATES IN LARGEST STUDY OF U.S. LAWYERS

NEARLY 1 IN 2 HIGHLY BURNED OUT, WITH BURNOUT STRONGLY LINKED TO MENTAL HEALTH DISTRESS

The results of a landmark study on lawyer mental health and well-being, published last week, included sizable responses from Kentucky Lawyers and Judges. The new study, which is the largest ever administered of actively licensed U.S. lawyers, was recently conducted through a partnership between the American Bar Association Commission on Lawyer Assistance Programs (CoLAP) and Krill Strategies, a behavioral health consulting firm for the legal profession. Kentucky is proud of the broad participation of lawyers and judges and also that it played a pivotal role in the participation and distribution of the survey. Kentucky Lawyer Assistance Program Director, Yvette Hourigan, the current chair of the Commission on Lawyer Assistance Programs, has spent much of her three-year term encouraging state and local bar associations, state lawyer assistance programs, and the courts to engage in the process so that survey results would provide a meaningful representation of the status of lawyer well-being and mental health. The response was three times larger than the original 2016 study on lawyer mental health and well-being.

Randomly sampled survey of nearly 37,000 lawyers across all Census regions also finds 41% feel the profession has been detrimental to their mental health.

On a national level, nearly half of all attorneys surveyed screened positive for high or very high work-related burnout, with burnout strongly linked to higher rates of depression, anxiety, and stress, and more than one in four screened positive for higher-risk hazardous drinking.

The study, titled “When Demands Equal Distress: An Updated Understanding of Lawyer Mental Health and Well-being,” was recently published with open access in the *Journal of Affective Disorders*, a leading peer-reviewed journal focused on depression, anxiety, and related conditions.

The study provides a crucial 10-year update to the first national study of lawyer mental health while offering the first large-scale estimate of work-related burnout among lawyers.

Researchers Patrick R. Krill, of Krill Strategies, and Justin J. Anker, Ph.D., from the Department of Psychiatry and Behavioral Sciences at the University of Minnesota Medical School surveyed a very large, random sample of practicing lawyers from 28 participating jurisdictions that represented all four official U.S. Census Bureau-designated regions and all nine divisions within those regions. The resulting sample was then weighted to reflect the current demographic composition of the profession as reported in the American Bar Association’s 2024 National Lawyer Population Survey.

ADDITIONAL DETAILS AND REACTIONS



Announcement from the American Bar Association



Summary of the Research



Published Study

KEY FINDINGS INCLUDE:

- 21.6% screened positive for moderate-or-higher depression, 20.4% for anxiety, and 18.9% for stress.
- 47.4% reported high or very high work-related burnout—the first large-scale national estimate of its kind among lawyers.
- Higher burnout was strongly linked to greater likelihood of moderate-or-higher depression, anxiety, and stress.
- 26.4% screened positive for higher-risk hazardous drinking (41.8% met the standard clinical threshold).
- 30.8% reported encountering a legal professional in the past year whose well-being raised concerns about fitness to practice.
- 41.1% of lawyers reported that time in the legal profession has been detrimental to their mental health.
- 27% reported considering leaving the profession due to mental health, burnout or stress.
- Only 39.1% believed employers were doing enough to support lawyers’ mental health and well-being.
- Younger lawyers and those working the longest hours faced the highest risk.
- 81% of lawyers believe it is either very important (52.2%), or important (29%) for the profession to focus greater effort on reducing mental health and substance misuse among lawyers. An additional 15.7% believe it is somewhat important leaving only about 3% who believe it’s not important to reduce mental health and substance misuse problems in the profession. These numbers are significantly higher than anticipated and represent a profession that well understands the danger of the revealed statistics and that there must be improvements from every stakeholder in our profession to take care of ourselves and our colleagues.