



Mental Wellbeing

This month sees the start of a new series of articles by Dr Libby Artingstall and Dr Sile McDaid, Co-Founders and Directors of Team Mental Health...

In April we saw the publication of the 'Resilience and Wellbeing Survey 2019' by the Junior Lawyer Division (JLD) of the Law Society of England and Wales¹. Completed by 1,803 members, this is the third survey of its kind and, in our opinion, its findings provide the opportunity to reflect and consider what meaningful action can be taken to support the mental health and wellbeing of the legal profession.

The vast majority of those responding to the survey worked in private practice (91.7%) and included solicitors with up to 5 years post qualification experience, trainee solicitors and LPC students (including paralegals) from across England and Wales.

Figures available suggest that in the UK, 1 in 4 adults will experience a mental illness every year². Therefore, it may not be unreasonable to expect a similar proportion of Junior Lawyers to experience the same. However, almost 1 in 2 of those responding to the survey (48%) reported experiencing mental ill health (whether formally diagnosed or not) in the last month and 1 in 15 (6.4%) reported experiencing suicidal thoughts.

Of those who had experienced mental ill health in the previous month:

- Over one-third (38.5%) reported nearly making a mistake that would not have happened otherwise;
- over three-quarters (80.7%) reported that their employer was not aware;
- over four-fifths (87.1%) thought their employer could do more to provide help, guidance or support;
- over one-third (34.1%) looked for another job.

Whilst these statistics make stark reading, it is important to consider what insights we can gain from the wider survey findings and what positive action can be taken to make a real and meaningful impact for individuals and firms.

With 93.5% of respondents reporting experiencing stress in their role in the last month, work-related stress appears to be a significant factor. This was defined as being under too much emotional or mental pressure as a result of work. We know that whilst work-related stress itself is not considered a mental illness; it is a significant risk factor for developing one. Indeed, research shows that people exposed to prolonged periods of work-related stress are more likely to develop an anxiety disorder or depression³. As such, understanding, recognising and managing work-related stress can have a significant and positive impact.

When it comes to understanding work-related stress, the Health and Safety Executive have identified six key areas as leading to problems if not managed well: Demands, control, support, relationships, role and change⁴. Three of these are clearly reflected in the JLD survey results, with those experiencing stress at work highlighting the following areas as significant causative factors:

Demands	High workload (63.7%) Client demands or expectations (52.5%) Billable hours targets (31.4%)
Control	Lack of control (35.6%)
Support	Lack of support (41%) / ineffective management (39.4%)

In order to understand and manage stress effectively in the workplace, it is important for firms to complete stress risk assessments which involves exploring each of these six areas and implementing change when required.

Whilst it is important for employers to fulfil their legal duty in this



Dr Libby Artingstall



Dr Sile McDaid

regard, firms can also make a significant impact by informing and empowering people to look after and protect their own mental health. Through ensuring the delivery of a meaningful mental health awareness programme across the whole of an organisation, we can educate all employees to promote good mental health and wellbeing; detect signs of work-related stress and mental ill health; and intervene early.

If we do recognise the signs of stress in ourselves or colleagues, early intervention is key. Stress management is very individual, and it is important for everyone within an organisation to know what works for them. There are some simple ways to manage stress and support good mental health and wellbeing which can, and should, be part of our daily lives. In 2008, the New Economics Foundation published the "five ways to mental wellbeing" on behalf of Foresight Government Office for Science.

The evidence highlights five actions to improve wellbeing:

- **Be active:** Physical activity supports body and mind
- **Connect:** Make time for friends, family and colleagues
- **Take notice:** Be present and mindful, appreciate the things that make you happy
- **Keep learning:** Set yourself new challenges, rediscover an old interest
- **Give:** Show kindness and express gratitude, remember to be kind to yourself too⁵.

In January 2017, the Prime Minister commissioned an independent review into how employers can better support the mental health of all people currently in employment. The result was that in October 2017, Paul Farmer & Dennis Stevenson published the "Thriving at Work" review and made a number of recommendations based on their findings. The most important recommendation was that all employers, regardless of size or industry, should adopt the "mental health core standards". The 6 recommended core standards are:

- Produce, implement and communicate a mental health at work plan;
- develop mental health awareness among employees;
- encourage conversations about mental health and the support available when employees are struggling;
- provide employees with good working conditions;
- promote effective people management;
- routinely monitor employee mental health and wellbeing⁶.

Whilst there is no legal obligation to implement the mental health core standards at present, they lay the foundations for an approach to workplace mental health which will ensure 'breadth' of change and mentally healthier workforces. In our opinion, organisations proactive in implementing these core standards will benefit from a return in investment by way of: Healthier, happier and increasingly satisfied employees; improved morale and productivity; reduced presenteeism and absenteeism; and protection from reputational damage and the costs of litigation.⁶⁻¹¹

Mental Health Awareness Week takes place from 13th – 19th May 2019 and provides a great opportunity to raise awareness. More importantly though, it's the perfect time for firms to commit to taking real and meaningful action over the year ahead to support positive mental health and wellbeing and tackle the



challenges mental ill health can present. Make 2019 the year that you invest in your greatest assets, your people. Mental health really matters.

If you would like to learn more about the work Team Mental Health do to support organisations implement the mental health core standards, please contact us at training@teamentalhealth.co.uk or visit our website at www.teamentalhealth.co.uk



**Dr Libby Artingstall & Dr Sile McDaid,
Co-Founders & Directors Team Mental Health**

References:

1. The Law Society (2019). Resilience and wellbeing survey 2019: Survey report. Junior Lawyers Division. Available online at: <http://communities.lawsociety.org.uk/Uploads/b/y/k/resilience-wellbeing-survey-report-2019.pdf>
2. MQ (2017). 12 statistics to get you thinking about mental health in young people. Available online at: <https://www.theguardian.com/mental-health-research-matters/2017/jan/20/12-statistics-to-get-you-thinking-about-mental-health-in-young-people>

3. Health & Safety Executive (2019). Mental health conditions, work and the workplace. Available online at: <http://www.hse.gov.uk/stress/mental-health.htm>
4. Health & Safety Executive (2019). Work-related stress. Available at: <http://www.hse.gov.uk/STRESS/index.htm>
5. The New Economics Foundation & Foresight Government for Statistics (2008). Five ways to mental wellbeing. Government Office for Science. Available at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/five-ways-to-mental-wellbeing>
6. Farmer, P & Stevenson, D. (2017) Thriving at Work: The Stevenson / Farmer Review of Mental Health and Employers. Available at: https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/658145/thriving-at-work-stevenson-farmer-review.pdf
7. Health and Safety Executive (2008) Management standards for work-related stress and Pricewaterhouse Coopers (2008) Building the case for wellness.
8. Knapp, M., McDaid, D., & Parsonage, M. (2011). Mental Health Promotion and Mental Illness Prevention: The Economic Case. Available at gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/215626/dh_126386.pdf
9. Mills P, Kessler R, Cooper J, Sullivan S (2007). Impact of a health promotion program on employee health risks and work productivity. American Journal of Health Promotion 22:45-53.
10. NICE (2009). Mental wellbeing at work. National Institute of Health and Care Excellence. Available at: <https://www.nice.org.uk/guidance/ph22>
11. Sainsbury Centre for Mental Health (2007) Mental health at work: developing the business case. Policy paper 8. London: Sainsbury Centre for Mental Health.

LawCare

Supporting the Legal Community

0800 279 6888

www.lawcare.org.uk

1800 991 801

www.lawcare.ie



facebook.com/LawCare



@LawCareLtd



LawCare
PO Box 147
Benfleet SS7 3WX

Admin: +44 1268 771 333

**admin@lawcare.org.uk
admin@lawcare.ie**

LawCare Ltd. Registered Office: 50 Broadway, London SW1H 0BL

Company registration no. 3313975.
Registered as a charity in England and Wales no. 1061685,
and in Scotland no. SCO39335.

**How are you,
really?**

LawCare
Supporting the Legal Community