

# Wellbeing Survey 2024

## Introduction

A huge thank you to everyone that took the time to reply to our Wellbeing Survey. We received a total of 227 responses between 1<sup>st</sup> and 30<sup>th</sup> November 2023, with input from a wide range of firms, individuals and roles within the profession.

When we first asked our members for feedback in September 2019 (the results published as our 2020 Wellbeing Survey) we were not quite sure what to expect. We knew from the work carried out by the Junior Lawyers Division and others that elements of the profession were struggling, but we did not know whether our own members were experiencing similar issues. The results were clear, and those who read the report will recall that 88% of those that replied had experienced stress at work, and nearly one in five had experienced physical symptoms.

## Analysis

There were reasons to suspect that overall levels of anxiety and mental ill health may have increased since 2019, with the covid pandemic being an obvious factor. However, that led to a significant increase in flexible working. For the first time we are able to see the impact of these changes and where it is possible to do so the results are presented together with those from 2019 as a comparison.

There is move in the degree of symptoms escalating slightly from *mild* to *moderate*. The single largest cause of stress remains *clients' expectations and management* and the number of members highlighting this has risen notably, as have issues with a *high workload*.

The consequences remain a huge concern. MOST people *lost sleep*. Nearly half *made or nearly made a mistake*. Many experienced *problems in their relationships* or *looked for another job*.

A reason to run the survey is the opportunity to share strategies members have put in place to manage or reduce stress levels. *Talking to family* is amongst the most mentioned, together with *exercise* and *taking a proper break*. Unhappily some report they have had to seek *counselling* or are *leaving the profession altogether*.

Managers will perhaps be pleased to see that the percentage of those who believe their organisation could offer more help/training has fallen from 63% to 52%.

## Comparisons between groups

Although we do so cautiously given the range of variables, our results allow us to draw some comparisons between groups. For example, members may be interested to know that those who work mainly in the office are more likely to answer that they are *never* stressed, and less likely to answer that they are *regularly* stressed, but this is at the cost of a bump in the *occasionally* stressed category. Interesting, but perhaps not enough to argue a case strongly in favour of the benefits of either.

**How often in the last month have you felt stressed (defined as being under too much emotional or mental pressure) as a result of work?**

<b>Answer</b>	<b>Work mostly at home</b>	<b>Work mostly at office</b>
Regularly	25%	22%
Occasionally	37.5%	44%
Rarely	29%	23%
Never	8%	11%

Members may have considered whether partners/directors suffer higher or lower levels of stress than others within the organisation? Do additional responsibilities to the regulator and to the bank outweigh an assumed ability to more directly influence their working life? The answer appears to be that a partner/director is less likely to *never* be stressed but is just as likely to respond that they are *regularly stressed*.

**How often in the last month have you felt stressed (defined as being under too much emotional or mental pressure) as a result of work?**

<b>Answer</b>	<b>Others</b>	<b>Partners/Directors</b>
Regularly	23%	23%
Occasionally	44%	41%
Rarely	22%	30%
Never	12%	7%

**What are we doing/what can we do about it?**

Of course, the most important question when given these results is for the Society to ask “what can we do to help?”. If as stated, the two biggest triggers for our members managing client expectations and a high workload, then what can we do? The committee are sourcing courses that may assist members in managing expectations and details will be made available shortly in the usual way. As to a high workload, perhaps the best we can do is to carry out exercises such as this so that managers can see the issues that are arising, and the many adverse and severe consequences that follow. Ultimately, it is clear that members will vote with their feet and leave an environment that is not supportive of their wellbeing.

A number of responses referenced the role of Mental Health First Aiders within their organisation. Since our 2020 report we have offered and repeated workshops that lead to this accreditation, and our Magazine offers the contact details of MHFAs who may be willing to speak to members who work for firms with no MHFA of their own.

29% of members did not know of an organisation that they could talk to or approach for help. We are pleased to give details of some organisations at the end of this report, but any of our Mental Health First Aiders can offer details of other organisations and resources that may help.

Suggestions for events to take place in 2024 already include yoga and meditation sessions, more pub walks, and even a sauna. As usual, further details will follow in the magazine, email and BDLS social

media. We propose to hold regular open meetings through the year to discuss wellbeing issues, strategies and solutions and all are welcome to attend.

The Society now enjoys over 700 members. With that wealth of shared knowledge and experience we look forward to tackling the challenges posed by stress and mental ill health together, and doing all that we can to improve the wellbeing of all of us.

**Mark Kiteley**

## Survey Results

### PART 1: PROFILE OF RESPONDENTS

<b>Please confirm which category you fall into</b>	<b>2023 (%)</b>	<b>2023 (responses)</b>
Paralegal	9%	21
Trainee Solicitor	10%	23
Solicitor up to 5 years PQE	10%	22
Solicitor with over 5 years PQE	22%	50
Director/Partner	21%	48
Barrister	0%	0
Other Regulated Professional (CILEx, CLC)	8%	19
Non fee earning role	8%	18
Role directly supporting a fee earner	7%	16
HR/IT/other corporate services role	4%	10

<b>What type of organisation do you work for?</b>	<b>2023 (%)</b>	<b>2023 (responses)</b>
Private practice (small firm, 1-4 partners)	25%	55
Private practice (medium firm, 2-25 partners)	58%	130
Private practice (large firm, 26+ partners)	12%	27
Government	3%	6
In-house	0	0
Third sector	0.5%	1
Other (please specify)	2%	5

<b>How many days per week do you work from home?</b>	<b>2023 (%)</b>	<b>2023 (responses)</b>
None – I work in the office everyday	62%	139
1	14%	32
2	11%	24
3	6%	13
4	3%	7
5/I am fully	5%	11

<b>As part of your job, do you work for vulnerable clients? Vulnerable by virtue of age, mental or physical health difficulty, as a result of being in custody, through lack of capacity, through experience of trauma, or who are vulnerable for any other reason</b>	<b>2023 (%)</b>	<b>2023 (responses)</b>
Yes	53%	120
No	47%	107

<b>Gender</b>	<b>2023 (%)</b>	<b>2023 (responses)</b>
Female, including transgender women	71%	161
Male, including transgender men	25%	57
Non-binary	0	0
Prefer not to say	2%	5
Other (please specify)	1%	3

Age	2023 (%)	2023 (responses)
Under 18	0	0
18-24	8%	18
25-34	25%	57
35-44	22%	49
45-54	21%	48
55-64	20%	45
65+	4%	10

Which of the following best describes your ethnicity?	2023 (%)	2023 (responses)
Bangladeshi	0	0
Chinese	0	0
Indian	0	0
Pakistani	0	0
Any other Asian background	1%	2
African	0.5%	1
Caribbean	0	0
Any other Black background	0	0
White and Asian	0	0
White and Black African	0.5%	1
White and Black Caribbean	0	0
Any other Mixed/Multiple ethnic background	1%	3
British/English/Welsh/Northern Irish/Scottish	89%	201
Irish	0	0
Gypsy or Irish Traveller	0	0
Roma	0	0
Any other White background	5%	12
Arab	0	0
Prefer not say	3%	6
Other (please specify)	0.5%	1

Which of the following best describes your sexual orientation?	2023 (%)	2023 (responses)
Bisexual	4%	9
Gay/Lesbian	2%	5
Heterosexual/Straight	88%	197
Prefer not to say	6%	14
Other (please specify)	0	0

How often in the last month have you felt unable to cope as a result of stress?	2023 (%)	2023 (responses)	2019 (%)
Regularly	12%	27	12%
Occasionally	38%	86	28%
Rarely	31%	69	36%
Never	19%	43	25%

## PART 2: STRESS IN THE WORKPLACE

<b>How often in the last month have you felt stressed (defined as being under too much emotional or mental pressure) as a result of work?</b>	<b>2023 (%)</b>	<b>2023 (responses)</b>	<b>2019 (%)</b>
Regularly	23%	45	23%
Occasionally	43%	85	36%
Rarely	23%	46	29%
Never	11%	21	12%

<b>How would you typically describe the level of stress?</b>	<b>2023 (%)</b>	<b>2023 (responses)</b>	<b>2019 (%)</b>
No negative stress	9%	17	9%
Mild	26%	52	30%
Moderate	51%	101	46%
Severe	12%	23	11%
Extreme	1%	2	3%
Don't know	2%	3	0%

<b>What do you consider to be the cause of the stress at work that you experience? (please select all that apply)</b>	<b>2023 (%)</b>	<b>2023 (responses)</b>	<b>2019 (%)</b>
Billable hours targets	19%	35	22%
Lack of support	23%	43	22%
High workload	61%	113	53%
Ineffective management	22%	41	20%
Client demands/expectations	63%	116	56%
Lack of resources	19%	36	17%
Lack of control	16%	30	15%
Other (please specify)	11%	20	15%

<b>In the last month, have you experienced any of the below situations as a result of work related stress? (please select all that apply)</b>	<b>2023 (%)</b>	<b>2023 (responses)</b>	<b>2019 (%)</b>
Considered taking time off but did not	30%	59	33%
Took time off	7%	13	5%
Made a mistake that would not have happened otherwise	11%	22	17%
Nearly made a mistake that would not have happened otherwise	31%	61	33%
Experiences problems with family or relationships	19%	37	28%
Looked for another job	16%	32	20%
Negative impact on mental health (anxiety, emotional upset and fatigue, negative and depressed thoughts, self-harm)	43%	84	40%
Experienced suicidal thoughts	1%	1	2%
Negative impact on physical health (feeling physically sick, chest pains)	21%	41	19%
Disrupted sleep	54%	105	62%
None of the above	19%	36	18%
Other (please specify)	5%	9	3%

**What strategies or mechanisms do you have in place to manage or reduce your stress levels?**

Lots of our members referred to taking exercise, talking to family and taking breaks. Breathing and meditation exercises, spending time in nature and writing lists were also popular. Some strategies such as working from home can be restricted by management and by policies which require notice periods inconsistent with the problem they are designed to address. Seeking medical attention, changing firms and leaving the profession altogether are the response when the strategies are not effective or not allowed to be effective.

<b>Do you think your organisation could do more to provide help/guidance/support to employees in relation to stress at work?</b>	<b>2023 (%)</b>	<b>2023 (responses)</b>	<b>2019 (%)</b>
Yes	52%	98	63%
No	48%	90	37%

**What is your employer currently doing or could it be doing to support employees experiencing stress at work?**

There was a real mix of answers to this question. Positive responses from employers include *an awareness of each employees stress levels* which they *attempt to mitigate*, dedicated mental health partners, Mental Health First Aiders and an open atmosphere for discussion and support. Others however cite examples of colleagues attempting to raise mental health and *being pushed away*, or *not doing a great deal*.

**PART 3: MENTAL HEALTH IN THE WORKPLACE**

<b>Within the last month, have you experienced mental ill-health (whether formally diagnosed or not)?</b>	<b>2023 (%)</b>	<b>2023 (responses)</b>	<b>2019 (%)</b>
Yes	32%	61	34%
No	68%	127	66%

<b>Was your employer aware that you were experiencing mental ill-health?</b>	<b>2023 (%)</b>	<b>2023 (responses)</b>	<b>2019 (%)</b>
Yes	8%	15	11%
No	31%	58	27%
N/A	61%	114	62%

<b>In the last month, have you experienced any of the below situations as a result of your mental ill-health? Please select all that apply.</b>	<b>2023 (%)</b>	<b>2023 (responses)</b>	<b>2019 (%)</b>
Considered taking time off but did not	26%	42	27%
Took time off	8%	12	4%
Made a mistake that would not have happened otherwise	6%	10	13%
Nearly made a mistake that would not have happened otherwise	11%	17	23%
Experienced problems with family or relationships	14%	23	22%
Looked for another job	9%	14	14%
Negative impact on mental health (anxiety, emotional upset and fatigue, negative and depressed thoughts, self-harm)	31%	50	31%
Experienced suicidal thoughts	1%	2	2%
Negative impact on physical health (feeling physically sick, chest pains)	18%	28	19%
Disrupted sleep	39%	62	42%
None of the above	42%	67	44%
Other (please specify)	1%	1	2%

<b>Does your organisation provide any help/guidance/support to employees in relation to mental health at work?</b>	<b>2023 (%)</b>	<b>2023 (responses)</b>	<b>2019 (%)</b>
Yes	57%	106	53%
No	17%	31	15%
Don't know	26%	49	32%

<b>Do you think your organisation could do more to provide help/guidance support to employees in relation to mental health at work?</b>	<b>2023 (%)</b>	<b>2023 (responses)</b>	<b>2019 (%)</b>
Yes	52%	93	60%
No	48%	86	40%

**What is your employer currently doing or could it be doing to support employees in relation to mental health at work?**

A lot of members were hoping for more communication, signposting and discussion of the issue. One response summed up their view *I think the organisation struggles to recognise mental health. I think the profession does too.*

<b>Do you know of any organisations that are there to help if you want to discuss stress at work or any other mental illness?</b>	<b>2023 (%)</b>	<b>2023 (responses)</b>	<b>2019 (%)</b>
Yes	71%	131	67%
No	29%	53	33%



## **Help and Advice**

[www.lawcare.org.uk](http://www.lawcare.org.uk)

LawCare promote and support good mental health and wellbeing in the legal community. Their helpline (0800 279 688) is manned Monday to Friday from 9am to 5.30pm. LawCare have launched a free online interactive resource for all legal professionals, FitForLaw. Full details are available on their website.

[www.Dorsetmind.uk](http://www.Dorsetmind.uk)

Dorset Mind are a pioneering local charity that have been supporting local people with mental health challenges since 1946. There are various resources available on their website, and they offer support groups and befriending. They are not a crisis service and do not have a manned telephone line.

<https://thesolicitorscharity.org/>

The Solicitors' Charity (formerly known as the SBA) helps solicitors (current and former) and those financial dependent with financial, emotional and practical support. Telephone 020 8675 6440.

[www.samaritans.org](http://www.samaritans.org)

The Samaritans offer emotional support and a listening ear 24 hours a day, 365 days a year. Call 116123.