

Men's mental health in the legal profession

LawCare is the mental wellbeing charity for the legal profession. We recently identified that a significant majority (approximately 65%) of the people using our support services were female, with only 35% being male. This prompted us to ask why male legal professionals aren't talking to us about their mental health.

We organised an all-male focus group to better understand why men in law don't speak up about their mental health, here is what we found:

Wanting to be strong and perfect

There is a challenge of being both a man and a lawyer. As men, there is still a palpable expectation that they should be strong, not display vulnerability, and be able to shoulder the burden of personal problems by themselves.

In addition, working as a lawyer adds further pressure to this sense of needing to appear perfect to the outside world – the perception that lawyers need to have all the answers. This perception, combined with the expectations men experience, can make it very difficult to reach out for help.

One member of the focus group suggested that we need to redefine what 'manliness' requires. It shouldn't be about downing seven shots of whiskey to prove how much of a man you are or working yourself towards a state of burnout.

Working long hours

There was a consensus that lawyers tend to take on more work than they have time for – leaving many of them feeling overstretched most of the time. Lawyers consistently work long hours to demonstrate their commitment to the profession or their organisation. This culture can amplify the issues that men face when it comes to talking about their mental health.

Uncertainty about opening up

Men can also be uncertain about opening up about a mental health issue at work, or even acknowledging to themselves that they have an issue.

Men in the legal profession, at all stages in their careers, may worry that seeking help will negatively impact their career and affect their family's welfare. They might worry about whether 'the whole thing is going to crumble;' or if they (and/or their career) fall apart, what will happen to their family and who will support them?

Emotional competence

Another barrier that can prevent men from reaching out for help is that some men don't have the emotional vocabulary to understand or express their experiences effectively. One focus group member reflected on the fact that he had spent most of his life telling people what he thought, but very much struggled to talk about how he felt.

Finding support

Many men don't know where to go to seek support, particularly if they don't want to talk about their mental health at work. They may find it difficult to talk to their family, partner or colleagues or access formal support that may be offered in the workplace. They can find it hard to let their guard down and be honest about how they are feeling but ignoring problems and burying yourself in work just to get through it can be counterproductive and lead to burnout and exhaustion.

You can contact LawCare about anything that is concerning you. Our support is free and confidential, and you don't have to give your name. We have 25 years of experience in supporting the legal community and everyone who provides support has worked in the law; we really do understand life in the law and all its challenges.

Contact LawCare on 0800 279 6888, email support@lawcare.org.uk or access online chat and other resources at www.lawcare.org.uk

You can also read the Men's mental health in the legal profession report.

By Elizabeth Rimmer – CEO of LawCare